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TOM TRUXTON'S OCEAN TRIP

TOM TRUXTON'S OCEAN TRIP

OR

THE ISLAND OF PALMS

BY

LIEUTENANT LOUNSBERRY

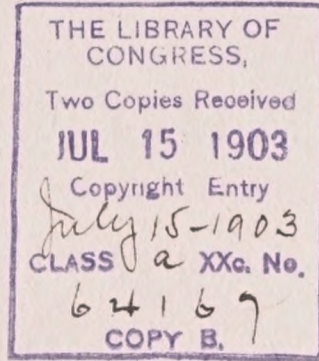
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"Tom Truxton's School Days," "Kit Carey's Protege,"
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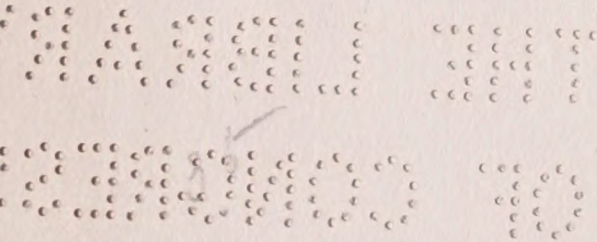


NEW YORK AND LONDON
STREET & SMITH, PUBLISHERS

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—
Tom Truxton's Ocean Trip



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TOM TRUXTON'S OCEAN TRIP.

CHAPTER I.

A WOMAN ON THE TRACK.

"Hi, there! Stop the car!"

"Look out; there's a woman on the track!"

"Great grief; if it isn't Mary Ann!"

"Where, Tom? I don't see her."

"Why, there, in front of that cable car, Chester."

"Bless me! it is Mary Ann. We must save——"

The remainder of the sentence was lost in the hubbub and turmoil of the busiest street in New York City.

The one addressed as Tom—a handsome, athletic youth—suddenly left his companion on the sidewalk, and, in an incredibly short space of time, had threaded his way through a maze of vehicles to where a woman was standing directly in the path of an approaching cable car.

She was evidently greatly bewildered, and glanced helplessly around, as if undecided which way to turn.

The constant clanging of the car gong and the frantic shouts of the numerous spectators on crowded Broadway

formed a pandemonium of noises impossible to describe, and it had exactly the opposite effect, keeping the woman in total ignorance of her danger.

Nearer and nearer swept the car, despite the efforts of the gripman, and, just as it seemed that the cruel wheels would add another victim to the list, the youth before mentioned sprang hastily across the track, and dragged the woman into safety.

The car swept by, brushing her skirts in its passage, and then came to a standstill a dozen feet away.

Still dazed, the woman turned on her rescuer, and, to his unbounded surprise, gave him a smart blow across the shoulder with her umbrella.

"Oi'll tache ye to lay yer hands an a dacent woman," she shouted. "Oi'm a lone female, but Oi——"

"Why, Mary Ann, don't you know me?" interrupted the youth, dodging her blows with laughable agility. "I am Tom Truxton, and——"

"Phat! Tom Truxton, is it?" screeched Mary Ann, dropping her umbrella, and grasping his hand. "Hiven bless us! it do be the same b'y as was at Professor Pickle's schule. But how come ye in the strate here, a-haulin' yer old friend around before all these grinnin' thafes, eh?"

"I was just in time to save your life, Mary Ann," replied Tom, briefly explaining the circumstances.

As he finished, the irate woman glared around until her eyes fell upon the gripman of the cable car.

Uttering a whoop that could have been heard two blocks, she darted forward with the umbrella in the air like a war club.

“Phat! that monkey-faced rogue run over me wid his old car!” she shrieked. “Oi’ll tache him a lesson he’ll remember till his dying day.”

Before she had gone very far, Tom grasped her by the arm and restrained her, while the gripman, seizing the opportunity, rapidly moved the car out of reach.

By that time a policeman had sauntered up, attracted by the gathering crowd.

“Phat’s the matter here, old woman?” he said, authoritatively. “Phat do ye mane by raising a rumpus and impadin’ the progress of the vehicles in this shtrate, Oi dunno?”

Wrenching herself free from Tom, Mary Ann marched up to the guardian of the peace, and, placing her arms akimbo, replied, scornfully:

“Old woman, yez call me, ye spalpane! Yer an old woman yerself. It’s digging praties or moinding the pig yez ought to be doin’, instead of walking around here, insulting respectable females.”

A howl of delight came from the crowd. The officer reddened and glanced about as if undecided whether or

not to arrest all within sight. Espying a little newsboy grinning with evident enjoyment, he made a dash for him.

The spectators scattered, and, in the excitement, the officer slipped around a corner, where he was seen, a moment later, vigorously fanning himself with his helmet. It was quite apparent he was glad to escape the sound of Mary Ann's martial voice.

In the meantime Tom had escorted her to the sidewalk, where he was soon joined by his former companion, Chester Gage.

"Come on, let's get away from this crowd," he said, hurriedly. "Call a carriage, Chester, and we'll take the old girl to the house. I want to hear what she has to say about Mother Simper's seminary."

"So Chester is here, too," remarked Mary Ann, attempting to throw her arms around that modest youth, to his great embarrassment. "Well, it's delighted Oi am to see yez both. And phat foine lads yez have grown to be! Och, Master Tom, won't Miss Violet be glad when I tell her of this mating."

Chester gave his chum a mischievous smile, and then went in search of a carriage. Presently returning with a double-seated one, the party stepped inside and were whirled away, to the evident disappointment of the crowd.

When a young lad, Tom—the only son and heir of a Wall Street banker, who had died under suspicious cir-

cumstances five years previous—was sent to Professor Pickle's Academy in the northern part of New York State by his guardian, Nicholas Flint.

The latter had been Banker Truxton's confidential clerk, and was supposed to be the only witness of his death.

Before leaving home for school, Tom had bravely rescued a young lady named Violet Vaughn from the jaws of a mad dog.

Shortly after his arrival at the academy he found that she was a student at Simper Seminary located near Pickle's Academy, and at which Mary Ann, an Irish-woman of combative disposition, was cook.

At the time of the mad dog episode a rough-looking stranger appeared on the scene, and making Tom's acquaintance, told him that he had traveled thousands of miles for the purpose of seeing Nicholas Flint.

Before he could explain further, the latter drove up and carried the stranger home in his coupé. That night the stranger disappeared.

At Pickle Academy Tom became intimate with a school-mate named Chester Gage, who ultimately became his chum, and who stood by him through many trials and adventures.

On his first day at school, Tom had trouble with Rufus Kane, an overgrown bully of quarrelsome nature.

Several weeks later Tom became aware of a plot brew-

ing against him, in which not only Rufus Kane, but Nicholas Flint and his servant, Cyrus Holt, were involved.

After many adventures, Tom was captured by his enemies and imprisoned in an old stone house not far from Pickle Academy. He there again met the mysterious stranger who had, by his own statement, traveled thousands of miles in search of Nicholas Flint. He also was a prisoner in the hands of Tom's villainous guardian.

They were both rescued through the efforts of Chester Gage. Nicholas Flint and Cyrus Holt were captured, but Rufus Kane, the bully of Pickle Academy, succeeded in making his escape.

At the trial of the ringleaders, the mysterious stranger announced himself as Walton Graves, the former night watchman of Mr. Truxton's bank.

He accused Nicholas Flint of having poisoned the banker for the purpose of gaining control of his fortune, and that he had also striven to cause the death of the heir, Tom Truxton, for a similar reason.

Under the excitement and terror of the accusation, Nicholas Flint became violently insane, and was ultimately transferred to an asylum.

His servant and tool, Cyrus Holt, was sent to prison for a term of years. At Tom's request Professor Pickle was made the new guardian of his fortune.

Tom returned to the academy in due time, and, together

with his chum, Chester Gage, finished his course of studies.

Our hero had long contemplated a voyage to sea, and when he finally graduated, he set about making arrangements looking toward the gratification of his desires.

Thus matters stood at the conclusion of the story above mentioned. Since then certain incidents had taken place which made it apparent that Tom would get to sea at an early date and for an extended voyage.

In the first place Professor Pickle—who had amassed a considerable fortune by teaching young ideas how to shoot—signified his intention of giving up the school.

During his later years at the academy the professor had developed a fondness for the science of botany, which grew to be a perfect passion. He had spent large sums in acquiring different species of the plant world, and had finally concluded that his collection was complete, when one day an old sea captain arrived in New York with a most peculiar specimen of the genus onion, of great medicinal value.

This he declared he had found on an island near the fiftieth parallel of south latitude and in a southeasterly direction from the Cape of Good Hope. The professor hastened to the metropolis and tried to secure the much-

prized specimen, but was an hour too late, the Smithsonian Institute securing it.

Professor Pickle became frantic from disappointment, and boldly declared his intention of obtaining a specimen of the wonderful onion if it took his entire fortune. He tried to ascertain the exact location of the island, but the sea captain was strangely reticent, not even the promise of a large sum of money having effect.

This only added fuel to the flames, and the professor set to work forthwith arranging an expedition. Seeing great promise of sport and adventure, Tom joined hands with him heart and soul. He agreed to furnish half the money on condition that he and Chester Gage were to become members of the party.

This was agreed to, and at the commencement of this story our hero, his chum, and the professor were stopping in New York, making the final arrangements for the expedition.

Tom and Chester were on their way to the hotel after having paid the last deposit on the yacht to be used by the party, when the former espied Mary Ann as chronicled above.

Since leaving the academy Tom had corresponded at intervals with Violet, but as several weeks had elapsed

since receiving the last letter, it was natural that he should have been delighted on running across Mary Ann, who would doubtless have news of the young lady.

He was destined to receive some very surprising intelligence.

CHAPTER II.

TOM MEETS NICHOLAS FLINT.

"Now, Mary Ann," began Tom, as they were carried rapidly uptown, "I consider this a very fortunate meeting in more ways than one. I succeeded in rescuing you from possible danger, and now you can repay me by giving me certain information——"

"Concerning Violet Vaughn," added Chester, in an innocent voice.

"Shut up, confound you!" exclaimed our hero. "You have nothing to do with the matter. I meant to say——"

"That yez wanted news from yer swateheart," interrupted Mary Ann, grinning broadly. "Well, it's meself can give ye that same. Oi'm jusht after laving the dear young lady."

"What? Is Violet in the city?"

"Yis. She came down this day, and is stopping near that place where they do be keeping the animiles."

"Castle Garden?" suggested Chester.

"No. She means Central Park," said Tom, threatening his mischievous companion with his clinched fist.

"Yis. Cintril Park. And what do yez think? She's

going away in a few days to a country away down beyant the big ocean."

"Is it possible! Well, this is startling news, I must say. Violet going to Europe at about the same time I intend sailing for the Antarctic Ocean."

"It's not Europe she's going to, but a wild, wild spot where they do be telling me the lions walk the strates all night and carry off the childers in their mout's. It's where the beautiful diamonds come from."

"Great grief! she must mean Cape Town!" exclaimed Tom, in amazement. "Why, how under the sun did this happen?"

"It's this way, Tom. She has an uncle down there in business, but phat kind Oi dunno. Maybe sellin' trunk straps to the elephants. He, he, he! Well, anyway, this uncle has sint for the dharling to come down on a visit, and she's going at the end of the week."

"Alone?"

"No; Oi do be going wid her as maid, but to tell yez the troot, it's agin' me will. Oi'm no missionary to go furninst the haythins. If it wasn't that Violet wanted me, Oi wouldn't step me fut beyant the dock."

By this time the carriage had arrived at the hotel. Tom was just in the act of descending when he heard his name called out in a loud voice. Looking up he saw Professor Pickle's familiar face at a window in the second story.

The old scientist held a telegram in his hand, which he waved at our hero in evident excitement.

"Something has happened," exclaimed Tom. "Chester, bring up Mary Ann. I'll run ahead and see what is the matter."

The professor met him at the door of his room.

"What is the cause of this excitement, sir?" asked Tom. "Has another onion come on the market?"

"Onion forsooth! How many times have I told you not to call the members of the genus *Allium* by that vulgar name, Thomas? Why, when you look at the delicate white laminæ of some varieties, and the——"

"Yes, yes, I have heard you mention that before," interrupted Tom, rather impatiently. "But what has happened? Why did you wave that telegram at me?"

"Oh, yes. I have just received word from the superintendent of the insane asylum where Nicholas Flint was confined, saying that he escaped night before last. At almost the same time Cyrus Holt received his freedom from the penitentiary because of the expiration of his sentence."

"Whew!" whistled Tom, his face expressing the liveliest surprise. "Well, this is news. I wonder if Cyrus has had anything to do with the escape of Nicholas Flint?"

"It is quite possible."

"Didn't you receive word some time ago that Flint was showing signs of recovery?"

"Yes, and the superintendent also stated that in his opinion the scoundrel had been shamming all the time."

"Well, if either of them turns up around here before we go, we'll see that they get their just deserts. Nothing has ever been heard of that precious rascal, Rufus Kane, has there?"

"Not a word. He was supposed to have escaped to Australia, I believe."

"Humph! he should have gone there years ago when it was a convict settlement. He would have felt more at home then."

"The top o' the marning to ye, professor!" shouted Mary Ann, appearing in the doorway.

Professor Pickle looked at her aghast, then whispered hastily to Tom:

"Bless my soul! where did that dreadful woman come from?"

Before that youth could explain, Mary Ann advanced and added, with a broad grin on her good-humored face:

"Ah ha! but yez look swate for an old felley. Do yez remimber the picnic near the academy when I rescued the pig, and swatted ye in the face wid a mince poi, I dunno?"

The recollection was evidently painful to the professor,

as he beat a hasty retreat to his bedroom, leaving Tom and Chester to entertain the Irishwoman.

Chester was for engaging an open carriage for the purpose of showing her the city, anticipating great sport from such an outing, but Tom refused.

"No, we have more important affairs to attend to, chum," he said. "We must see about the stores, and—and—I want to drop around to see Miss Vaughn for a moment."

"Yes, of course," replied Chester, disgustedly. "Don't want a fellow to have any fun, but you must go spooning. I'll be glad when we get to sea."

"Did I tell you about the word received by the professor this morning?" replied our hero, hurriedly changing the subject.

"No."

"Nicholas Flint has escaped from the asylum."

"Great Scott!"

"And Cyrus Holt has been released from prison."

"Worse still."

"We may run across them."

"I wouldn't be surprised," replied Chester, reflectively. "They are very bitter against us, and wouldn't hesitate to work us an injury. Now, if that young villain, Rufus Kane, was to bob up again, their set would be complete."

"It's rather queer that Nicholas Flint should escape directly after his old tool Cyrus had received his freedom."

"I guess Cyrus must have helped him. Well, we will soon be out of the country, and in a part of the world where they will never think of going."

"Oh, we needn't bother our heads about them," said Tom, carelessly. "While I take Mary Ann across to Miss Vaughn's residence, you can make yourself useful by calling upon the ship chandler with this list of stores. Tell him to have everything on board the *Explorer* by to-morrow evening sure."

"Where will you meet me after seeing Violet?"

"At the shipyard. Be there by noon and we will take lunch on board."

Chester left at once on his errand, while Tom after a moment of conversation with the professor, escorted Mary Ann to the house in which Violet was staying.

He was received by that young lady with demure cordiality, and spent a very pleasant half hour in her society.

"I was greatly surprised when Mary Ann told me that you were on the eve of leaving for Cape Town," he said, during the conversation. "How long do you expect to stay there?"

"Possibly four months," replied Violet. "And how much of a voyage do you intend to make with the professor?"

"It is hard to tell. We may be gone a year, and then again we may possibly return in half the time."

"This island is supposed to be south of the African Continent, is not not?"

"Yes, to the southeastward."

"Then you will probably pass close to the Cape of Good Hope, will you not?" suggested Violet, her cheeks reddening slightly.

"Why, of course we will, and we'll surely call in at Cape Town," exclaimed Tom, eagerly. "What a dolt I am not to realize that I will have a chance to see you again before——"

"He! he! he!" giggled Mary Ann, who had been seated quietly near the window.

"What is the matter with you?" demanded our hero, sternly.

"Nothin' at all, Tom," replied the jovial Irishwoman, with a prodigious grin. "Oi was jusht thinking av th' toime whin me fader's goat bit off Tim Murphy's chin whisker while he was aslape, and——"

Mary Ann did not have time to describe the sad catastrophe, as Tom arose and left, after bidding Violet farewell.

He little knew under what peculiar circumstances he would again see the young girl and her honest, good-natured maid.

Taking a train on the elevated road he was soon carried down to the foot of South Street where the Staten Island Ferry line has its pier.

The yacht purchased by Tom and the professor was at anchor in the lower bay near the Staten Island shore. To reach it Tom had to take the ferry, and then board the yacht in a rowboat.

Paying his fare at the gate, Tom passed on board just as the bell rang a signal to start. As it was a bright, warm day, he ascended to the upper deck, and was in the act of taking a seat upon one of the numerous camp stools scattered about, when he chanced to notice a man standing near the port railing.

Something in his pose struck Tom as familiar, and the youth stepped forward for the purpose of obtaining a better view.

As he did so the fellow turned in Tom's direction, then uttering a stifled cry, staggered back against the rail.

"Great grief! it's Nicholas Flint!"

With the exclamation still trembling upon his lips, Tom sprang forward with the intention of capturing his late guardian, the supposed insane criminal and recently-escaped prisoner from the State asylum.

The ferryboat was just in the act of leaving the slip, and at that moment was passing close to a two-storied pier with open sides.

As Tom started toward him, Nicholas Flint hastily glared around in search of an avenue of escape. He saw the proximity of the pier, and, with a shout of defiance, mounted the railing.

Divining his intention, Tom leaped to his side.

"Come back, you scoundrel!" he cried, attempting to grasp his arm.

He was a second too late.

Spurning the rail with his foot, Nicholas Flint made a flying leap for the pier, and landed safely upon the upper platform.

Quick as a flash, Tom followed suit, but, miscalculating the distance, he struck against the guard rail of the pier with a crash, and then tumbled backward into the swiftly-flowing waters of the river.

CHAPTER III.

ON BOARD THE NIGHTHAWK.

Tom's skill as a swimmer had never stood him in greater stead than at this moment. It seemed that he had hardly touched the water before the rapid current had carried him past the entrance to the ferry slip.

Despite his strenuous efforts, he was swept along until, at last, he brought up against another pier wall in the next slip.

At that moment a number of men, attracted by the cries of the horrified spectators on the ferryboat, started to the rescue. One of them, bearing a circular life-preserver, dangling at the end of a long rope, crawled out over the spiling.

This he lowered to Tom, and a few moments later our hero was hauled up to a place of safety, water-soaked, but still eager for the chase.

"Where did he go?" was his first question, after thanking his rescuer.

"Where did who go?"

"Why, the man who escaped from the Staten Island ferryboat. He is an insane criminal, named Nicholas Flint, and must be recaptured at once."

"Did he jump to that two-storied pier over there?"

"Yes. I tried to follow him, but fell a trifle short."

"I think I saw the fellow you mean," spoke up one of the bystanders. "Did he wear a slouch hat and rough-looking clothes?"

"Yes."

"Well, I saw him run along the second story of the pier, and then descend to the street near the elevated station."

"He has escaped by this time, then," said Tom, hopelessly. "I would give a hundred dollars, cash down, if I could capture him."

"It's no use, young feller," said the first speaker, carelessly. "He was making tracks at a great rate when I saw him. Better tell the police about it."

Thinking this good advice, Tom hurried to the station at Pier A, and gave the sergeant in charge a detailed description of Nicholas Flint.

Having part of his wardrobe on board the yacht, Tom did not return to the hotel for dry clothing, but took the next ferryboat for Staten Island.

On reaching the yacht—which was a schooner-rigged craft of about two hundred tons displacement, and very rakish in appearance—Tom went directly to the after-cabin, where he expected to find Chester in readiness for lunch.

On entering the saloon he saw that his chum had com-

pany. A dark-faced, elderly man, with coarse whiskers, was seated near the center table engaged in conversation with Chester.

The stranger arose to his feet, on seeing Tom, and bowed awkwardly.

"This is Captain Scroggins, of the bark *Nighthawk*," explained Chester, with a sly wink at Tom. "He is the skipper who discovered the wonderful plant Professor Pickle is so enthusiastic over."

"Yes, young man," said Scroggins in a deep, hoarse voice. "I am that individual, and I hev come aboard to see the boss of this here craft. Be you him?"

"I am part owner of the craft," replied Tom, rather coldly. "Can I be of any service to you, sir?"

"I reckon you can. I understand the professor is fitting out an expedition for the purpose of looking up this here island, and getting another specimen of that blooming onion."

"You have been rightly informed."

"Well, all I can say is, don't ye do it, my lad. Don't ye throw any good money away trying to find the island, because ye can't do it."

"We can't?" echoed Tom, in surprise. "What will hinder us, pray?"

"That I don't go for to say," replied Scroggins, dog-

gedly. "But you take a fool's advice and stay away from them southern latitoods, that's all."

"You sailed down there, and ran across the island all right, didn't you?"

"Yes, but——"

"Well, so will we, sir."

"I say again, ye'd better not, young feller. I know what I am talking about, and if ye know what's good for yer you'll give my island a wide berth."

"Your island?"

"Yes, I discovered it, and it belongs to me."

"Enough of this nonsense, sir," exclaimed Tom, impatiently. "If you haven't any better reason to offer than these mysterious allusions, you are wasting your time. We have fitted out this yacht for the purpose of discovering another specimen of a rare plant, and we intend to do it."

"Ye will, eh?" growled Scroggins, moving toward the companionway.

Pausing at the foot of the stairs, he shook his fist at our hero, and added in a voice hoarse with passion:

"I am going down there myself, consarn yer! And if I catch you or any one else a-fooling around the island I'll fix yer. Mark my words."

Still growling and muttering imprecations, Scroggins

disappeared on deck, and a moment later the sound of his oars was heard as he rapidly rowed ashore.

"Well, did you ever see such an old idiot?" exclaimed Chester, laughing heartily.

"He is a fool if he thinks he can scare us away by such talk. When did he come on board?"

"About half an hour ago. At first he said that he was a seafaring man, and desired to look over the yacht. I showed him around, and then he told me who he was. It is certainly very queer that he should object to our going down there."

"It is," replied Tom, thoughtfully.

"He can't be afraid we'll find another of those confounded onions?"

"No. There is something else in it. Maybe he found gold or precious stones on the island."

"That is possible. Don't you remember that he told old Pickle about having to put to sea again the night after landing because of a violent storm?"

"Yes; and he also stated that the wind was blowing on shore, and he expected to strike the beach every moment. He couldn't find bottom with his anchors, so he had to put out a sea anchor or a heavy raft of spars fastened astern with a long hawser. Notwithstanding the fierce gale blowing shoreward, the island was not in sight on the following morning."

"I remember that. It was deuced queer. But how on earth did you get so wet?"

Tom explained his adventure with Nicholas Flint, to Chester's great surprise.

"Jumping Moses! so he has turned up at last, eh? What a pity you didn't catch him. Did you see anything of Cyrus Holt?"

"No, but he might have been on the ferryboat. I am afraid we are going to have trouble with that pair of rascals, Chester. It looks suspicious that he should be on the Staten Island ferry."

"He might have heard about the expedition, and be on his way down here for some evil purpose."

"That is exactly my idea," exclaimed Tom. "Both Nicholas Flint and his former servant are capable of doing any piece of villainy to satisfy their desire for revenge."

"Well, we intend to leave the United States day after to-morrow, so we will keep a close watch for them until that time, and then snap our fingers."

A moment later Tom withdrew to his room and changed his wet clothes for others more comfortable. Then the two friends sat down to lunch which the attentive steward had spread upon the table.

After a while Professor Pickle came on board with a couple of porters carrying his scientific books and instruments.

On being told by Tom of the encounter with Nicholas Flint and the interview with Captain Scroggins, the professor displayed great uneasiness."

"The scoundrel ought to be recaptured at once," he said. "He is a dangerous man, and so long as he is at liberty we are liable to have trouble. As for Captain Scroggins, I am sorry he exhibited such temper, as I intended to ask him to go with us as sailing master."

"You did?" exclaimed Tom, in surprise.

"Yes, I thought it would be a good idea, as he knows the exact whereabouts of the island and could take us there without loss of time."

"From what he said this noon I doubt if he would consent," remarked Chester.

"He certainly wouldn't make a very desirable companion," said Tom, slowly shaking his head.

"We could stand him until the island was reached and a return to Cape Town made," persisted the professor, who was greatly taken with the plan. "We could ship him home from there easy enough."

"Well, you might try him and see if he'll go."

"Where is the *Nighthawk* anchored?"

"About a mile farther up the bay."

The professor glanced at his watch.

"It is now half-past four. I have to meet a scientist at the Astor House at six. The interview will be short, so

you can expect me here again by eight o'clock at the latest."

"All right. I'll have a boat in readiness."

The professor returned at the proper hour. Tom and he embarked at once, leaving Chester Gage to guard the yacht until their return, which neither expected would be later than eleven o'clock.

The night had grown very dark, but the twinkling lights along the Staten Island shore guided them on their way. The tide was with them, so the skipper's vessel was gained in quick time.

On reaching the gangway of the bark Tom and his companion climbed on board without being hailed.

"By Jove! they don't keep a very bright anchor watch," said our hero, glancing up and down the deserted deck.

Forward the door of the forecastle was open. The dim rays of a smoky lantern were shining through it, and ever and anon a burst of song came to their ears.

"Jack is making merry in the bows," muttered Tom. "I wonder if old Scroggins is doing likewise aft. We will go and see."

Together they walked toward the stern until the skylight in the deck about the cabin was reached. A heavy tarpaulin had been thrown over it, but so carelessly that one corner remained uncovered.

Tom instinctively halted and glanced down into the interior.

A second later he started back with a half-stifled cry of amazement. Grasping Professor Pickle by the arm he pointed toward the cabin, and whispered, hoarsely :

“Great grief! look down there. Quick! there is no time to lose!”

Professor Pickle did as requested. Around the center table of the cabin were three men and a youth—Scroggins, Nicholas Flint, Cyrus Holt and Rufus Kane!

CHAPTER IV.

AN INTERESTING CONVERSATION.

The man nearest the door of the cabin was Captain Scroggins. Seated next to the skipper was Nicholas Flint, an evil smile upon his attenuated face. On the opposite side was Cyrus Holt, while occupying a chair at the end of the table was the professor's former pupil, Rufus Kane.

The latter seemed much older in appearance, and the shabby garments in which he was clad proclaimed that he had experienced the rough side of the world since leaving Pickle Academy.

They had evidently been engaged in an animated conversation, probably heightened by the presence of a black bottle which Scroggins consulted very frequently.

All this Professor Pickle saw with one rapid glance. Turning hurriedly to Tom he whispered:

"This is simply marvelous. We could not have a better opportunity of capturing Flint and that young rascal Kane. Let us return to shore and get the police."

"Wait a moment. Perhaps we can overhear their conversation," replied Tom. "This looks very suspicious."

"That is so. What business can those fellows have on board this bark?"

"We will try to find out."

Leaning over, Tom gently felt the skylight. To his joy, he found that he could raise it.

Inch by inch, he elevated the sash until it was half a foot from the coaming. Then getting upon his knees, Tom bent his ear to the aperture. The professor followed his example, and the two listened intently to the conversation wafted up from below.

Scroggins was speaking, and his voice, husky with the years spent amid the salty blasts of many a gale, came plainly to the silent listeners over his head.

"So ye are with me, then, eh, mates?" he roared.

Then, thumping the table with one brawny hand, he added:

"It'll be the chance of yer life, mind that. What I described to ye, I seed with these two eyes, and if ye come along ye can have share and share alike. Then, ag'in, there's the chance to settle old scores with them people on the yacht."

"That is what we are after, mainly, captain," spoke up Nicholas Flint, rubbing his hands.

"Yes, we want revenge," added Cyrus Holt, vindictively. "I want to repay that young upstart, Tom Truxton, for the years I spent in prison."

"And I would give half my life to have all three of them in my power for one moment," added Rufus Kane, in such a ferocious voice that his companions, hardened in crime as they were, glanced at him in partial disgust.

"Well, ye can git satisfaction in due time, mates. Just keep alongside o' me, and I'll fix ye."

"We are very fortunate in running across you, captain," said Nicholas Flint. "When I made my escape, at last, from the asylum, where that young dog had placed me, I was almost discouraged."

"You would be there yet if it hadn't been for me," remarked Cyrus.

"And I guess I deserve a little credit," interposed Kane.

"Yes, and I am thankful to both of you."

"It isn't thanks we want, but money," replied Rufus, brutally.

"Ye'll git that, if you only do as I tell ye, and jine the *Nighthawk*," said Captain Scroggins, taking another pull at the black bottle.

"As I was saying, we were very lucky in crossing your path," continued Flint, impatiently. "When we reached New York, after the escape, I didn't know which way to turn. I had heard about this foolish expedition of old Pickle, and I was afraid they would leave the country without our having a chance at them."

"I understand they sail to-morrow night," said Cyrus.

"Yes, that is their intention."

"We'll be right behind them, mates. That is, if ye conclude to trust yer luck aboard this hooker. When ye tackled me for information, after I left the yacht, this afternoon, I thought you would turn out to be fellers arter my own heart. Will ye ship, mates?"

"You say you need three men?"

"Yes. I have seven bully boys, but I must have more to sail the bark. We will go down in ballast, and return with a hold full of stuff. What d'ye say?"

"Where is this island?" asked Nicholas Flint, reflectively.

"Ye'll know when ye git there, and not before," replied the skipper, bluntly. "I'm not giving my secrets away, my man. If ye'd had as much trouble, and such a scare as I did, ye'd refuse, too."

"Scare? What do you mean?"

"Ye'll find out in good time."

"Is it about the island?"

"Yes; but ye needn't try to pump me. Jim Scroggins can be as tight as an oyster when he chooses."

"What about that onion, or bulb, you brought home?" asked Cyrus Holt, curiously. "How did you know it was a rare specimen? You certainly don't look like a man who would dabble in botany."

"What do yer take me for, a fool?" roared the skipper

in disgust. "I had a sailor on board who had gone to sea for his health. He found it—at the bottom of the ocean; ho! ho! ho! He was a college chap, and the day we was ashore he picked up that there onion, and carried it aboard. I was going to eat the blamed thing, but he said as how it was very valuable, and would sell for a big lump of money. And so it did."

"It's a pity you didn't get a cargo of them."

"I would have, but the storm I was telling you about came up, and the next morning the island was gone. Well, are you going to ship or not? I am all ready to sail, and if ye'll sign articles we'll pull out when the yacht sails."

"It will be share and share alike?"

"Yes."

"And you will help us capture the yacht?"

"Yes, and give ye a hand to make them walk the plank, if you wish."

"Well, we'll join forces with you, captain."

"Good. We'll have a drink all around to——"

Crash!

Captain Scroggins was suddenly interrupted by the sound of splintering glass, and a large fragment struck the table directly in front of him.

In an instant the cabin was in an uproar. Springing to his feet the skipper rushed into an adjoining stateroom,

and instantly reappeared with a revolver clutched in his hand.

"On deck, mates!" he shouted. "Some person has been listening."

"I'll give the eavesdroppers a taste of this," exclaimed Rufus Kane, snatching a knife from a rack over the table.

Together they rushed up the steps, reaching the outer deck just in time to see two figures hastily disappear over the side near the gangway.

"There they go!" cried Nicholas Flint, indicating the direction with his hand. "There is a pair of them, and they are trying to escape."

"We'll soon stop them," replied Scroggins, cocking the revolver.

Rushing to the side he peered over and saw a rowboat just disappearing in the gloom.

"Come back here, or I'll fire!" he roared.

"Fire away, Captain Scroggins," called out a voice from the darkness.

Frantic with rage, the skipper pulled the trigger of his weapon. There was a sharp report, the flash of burning powder illumined the darkness for one brief second, then a mocking laugh came from the direction in which the boat had vanished.

Scroggins was in the act of firing again when he felt a hand placed on his shoulder with no gentle force.

"Ten thousand demons!" fiercely exclaimed Nicholas Flint. "Do not alarm the harbor, man."

"Let go of my shoulder. I'll l'arn the sharks to come snooking aboard my craft. Let go of me, I say!"

"Don't be a fool," replied Flint, harshly. "Keep cool. You'll need all of your nerve before many minutes."

"What d'ye mean?"

"Do you know who that was who shouted your name from the boat?"

"No."

"It was Tom Truxton."

A cry of surprise came from not only the captain but from Cyrus Holt and Rufus Kane as well.

"What!" stormed the former. "D'ye mean to say the young feller wot owns the yacht was aboard just now?"

"Yes, I'd know his voice among a thousand," replied Flint, grimly. "He was not only aboard of the *Nighthawk* three minutes ago, but he was listening at the cabin skylight."

"And he overheard our talk?"

"Beyond a doubt."

Just then Rufus, who had been examining the skylight, returned with the information that it had been raised from the coaming.

"It had been held up by a stick which was carried away during a roll of the bark," he added.

"We are in a precious pickle now," growled Scroggins.

"There is only one thing to do," replied Nicholas Flint.

"What is that?"

"Get under way at once. You said you were ready to sail. You have your crew, so up anchor and let us get to sea without delay."

"By the boots! I'll do it," shouted the skipper.

Running forward he routed out the men from the fore-castle, and within a few moments, the sullen clank of the anchor chain as it grated through the hawse-pipes sounded on the night air.

CHAPTER V.

TOM BOARDS THE BARK.

It is now time to return to Tom and Professor Pickle.

They had listened with breathless interest to the conversation carried on in the cabin of the *Nighthawk*, and just as Nicholas Flint had stated his determination to ship under Captain Scroggins, a slight lurch of the bark caused the skylight to fall with a crash.

Tom was leaning upon the glass at the time, and the force of the fall caused his elbow to penetrate the fragile partition.

Quick as a flash, Tom sprang to his feet.

"To the boat!" he exclaimed, running toward the gangway. "Jump over the side, professor. If they catch us, our lives will not be worth a moment's purchase."

It was evident Professor Pickle was of the same opinion, as he was directly at Tom's heels when that agile youth scrambled down into the cutter.

The two men manning it instantly realized that something was up. Rapidly working their oars, they left the side of the bark, and had reached a comparatively safe distance when Scroggins and the rest appeared over the low rail.

What followed has been described.

"Whew! that was a close shave," said Tom, grimly. "They came very near catching us."

"That they did," replied the professor, breathing heavily from the unwonted exertion.

"Ah! they must intend getting under way at once. Do you hear the clank of the capstan?"

"They are heaving short," spoke up one of the oarsmen. "And there goes a signal for a tug."

"We must stop them in some way," said Professor Pickle, hastily.

"Row ashore," cried Tom. "Quick, men; make for the ferry landing on Staten Island. We'll telephone for the New York police boat."

Seizing a spare oar, Tom assisted the sailors, and the light cutter was soon spinning over the waters of the bay toward the adjacent shore.

The professor took control of the tiller. He was hardly an expert, but he contrived to steer a moderately straight course.

As stated before, the night was very dark. The sky had become overcast, and rain threatened. Along the shore of Staten Island numerous twinkling lights proclaimed the location of divers vessels at anchor or tugs awaiting a call for a tow.

Not far in advance of the rowboat a red light came

tossing toward it. Then a green light suddenly appeared in close conjunction with the previous one.

The professor noticed them, but the sight did not inspire in his breast the slightest suspicion of danger. He admired the colors, and that was all.

Rapidly Tom and the sailors labored at the oars, with their backs turned to the approaching lights. The professor held the tiller with a firm grasp and steered directly for the shore.

Suddenly one of the oarsmen glanced over his shoulder. He instantly saw that of which the professor was blissfully ignorant. The lights were on a tug bearing down upon them and not a dozen yards away.

Uttering a hoarse shout of alarm, the frightened sailor sprang past Tom and seized the helm. Giving it a swing, he brought the cutter broadside to the rapidly nearing tug, at the same time shouting to the others to row for their lives.

Too late!

Forced along under the impetus of her powerful engines, the tug struck the frail sides of the cutter with a resounding crash, and in an instant the occupants were struggling amid the white spume of the tug's wake.

For the second time that day our hero found himself compelled to battle with the water of New York Bay.

Regaining the surface after the first plunge, he struck out boldly after the tug.

A moment later he came in contact with some one just rising to the top. It was the professor, and from the feeble strokes that the scientist was giving it was evident he could not swim very well.

"Help-p!" he sputtered, threshing the water wildly with his arms.

Hastily grasping him by the shoulder with one hand, Tom sternly bade him cease struggling.

"We are all right," our hero added, encouragingly. "The tug is returning to pick us up."

He had seen the light at the stern cease moving, then become larger as the craft swung around and steamed toward them. A hoarse hail came to the ears of those in the water.

"Ahoy! where are you?"

One of the sailors swimming close to Tom replied, and within a few minutes the tug bore down upon them. The work of rescue did not take long. Greatly exhausted and dripping from head to foot, the four former occupants of the ill-fated cutter were hauled on board by the deck hands.

"Where is the captain of this tug?" asked Tom.

A dark figure stepped down from the pilot house and approached the group.

"What in blazes do you mean by rowing around the harbor without a light?" came the demand, gruffly.

"Are you captain?" asked our hero.

"Yes."

"Well, we want your services at once."

"You do, eh? That's cool, I must say. I think I have just rendered you pretty fair service."

"Acknowledged," replied Tom, impatiently. "But what I mean is, that I desire to charter this tug for a couple of hours."

The captain scratched his head, and cast a glance at the shadowy outlines of the *Nighthawk*, a few cable lengths away.

"I was going out to answer that fellow's signal for a tow," he said, presently. "And I don't like to lose the job."

"What will he pay you?"

"According to where he wants to go. If he is bound past the Narrows, it'll be about thirty dollars, I reckon."

"Well, I can tell you that he is going to sea, if he can get there," said Tom. "But I am going to stop him, if I can."

"You are?"

"Yes; there is an escaped criminal on board. He must not be allowed to leave this harbor. Take us ashore, so



“Just as Scroggins and his companions rushed up, Tom launched himself through the air toward the near-by tug.”
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that we can telephone to the New York police boat, and I'll pay you double the sum you stated."

"Who are you?" asked the captain, cautiously.

"Oh, you needn't be afraid about the money," replied Tom, taking a well-filled pocketbook from his coat.

"Here are sixty dollars," he added, extending several bills.

"That's prompt payment, my boy. I'll go ye."

Entering the pilot house, he gave the engine-room bell a vigorous pull, and headed for the ferry wharf. Within a half hour Tom and the professor were ashore.

Communications with the police department in New York elicited the discouraging information that the patrol boat had left on another errand.

"Take several Staten Island police, and board the bark on a tug," advised the sergeant, at the other end of the wire. "Hold them in the name of the law, and we will join you before long."

"We'll try it," exclaimed Tom, decisively.

"We can take the same tug," suggested the professor.

"Go to the nearest station, and get as many officers as you can, while I secure the tug," directed Tom, hastily.

Professor Pickle succeeded in securing the services of four policemen, with whom he joined Tom at once.

As they boarded the craft, at the end of the wharf, another tug steamed slowly past, towing a bark. The creak-

ing of blocks and the flapping of loosened canvas indicated that her crew was hard at work preparing for sea.

Tom had entered the pilot house with the captain. Snatching up a night-glass, he leveled it at the dim outlines of the passing vessel.

"It's the *Nighthawk*," he exclaimed, a second later. "Run alongside of her at once, or we'll be too late."

"Just keep cool, young fellow," growled the skipper, in reply. "We'll overhaul them in a jiffy."

At that moment the professor and the sergeant in charge of the police squad entered the apartment.

"There is no chance of mistake in this affair?" asked the latter. "You are positive the man you are after is on board of that vessel?"

"Yes, and you will find him a pretty tough customer," replied Tom. "You had better advise your men to have their revolvers in readiness. The scoundrels on board of that bark will not submit without a struggle."

"If you succeed in capturing them I'll promise to make it worth your while," said Professor Pickle. "There is a man named Nicholas Flint, and a youth of about nineteen years of age, on her. For each I will pay five hundred dollars."

"They are as good as captured already," replied the officer, grimly. "They won't dare resist an officer of the law."

"You don't know them," remarked Tom, rather contemptuously.

"Stand-by, you fellows," sung out the captain. "We'll be within hailing distance in a moment."

Tom left the pilot house with the sergeant, and, taking his stand near the bow, prepared for the struggle which he knew was impending. He realized that his former guardian would resist capture to the last. Even with the police at his command, our hero felt very dubious of the result.

"I wish the New York patrol boat would appear about now," he muttered, half to himself.

"We don't need it," replied the sergeant, importantly. "We will walk right aboard of that craft, and have them in irons before you can say Jack Robinson."

Tom did not feel the confidence of his companion, but he refrained from answering. They were now within hailing distance. Shaping his hands like a trumpet, our hero shouted at the top of his voice:

"Ahoy the *Nighthawk*!"

"What d'ye want?" came the reply, in Captain Scroggins' fog-horn voice.

"Signal your tug to stop; we want to speak with you."

"Ain't got time."

"Lay to, confound you!" shouted the sergeant, in a

rage. "I am an officer of the law, and I want to board you."

"Go to blazes! If you try to climb aboard this hooker, I'll dump you into the briny, officer or no officer."

"Run alongside, captain," howled the policeman. "Make for the gangway, do you hear? I'll show those people what the law can do."

In obedience to the skipper's touch at the wheel the tug sheered close to the moving bark. Tom and the sergeant were on the point of springing into the *Nighthawk's* rigging when she lurched away leaving a broad space between the two craft.

At the same moment Captain Scroggins' squat figure appeared at the gangway. He had a pistol clutched in his right hand. Leveling it at the party on the tug, he shouted:

"Sheer off, ye bloody pirates, or I'll fire. This is an honest vessel, and I won't have it boarded by nobody."

"You have an escaped criminal on board named Nicholas Flint," called out Tom, hotly. "Surrender him, or take the consequences."

"There ain't any person aboard except the regular crew," replied Scroggins. "I know what ye are. You're boarding-house shanghiers, and you want to steal my crew."

"Don't waste any further words with him," whispered

Tom. "Get your men up here, and we'll jump on board and take chances."

"I'll show him what the law is," blustered the sergeant, but he did not make any move toward massing his men as Tom had directed.

Seeing that he need expect little aid from the fellow, Tom set his teeth with grim determination, and waiting until the tug had been brought alongside once more, made a leap for the mizzen rigging.

CHAPTER VI.

STARTLING NEWS.

It was a daring attempt, but proved successful, and a few seconds later Tom found himself on the after deck of the bark confronting Captain Scroggins.

One rapid glance to the rear showed him that he was alone. Not one of the police had followed, and to make it worse, the tug had dropped astern and was at least ten yards away.

"What d'ye mean, you young scalawag, a-boardin' my craft like that?" roared the skipper, making a rush for him.

He stopped suddenly, however, and then backed away from the frowning muzzle of Tom's revolver.

"I have come for your passengers, and I mean to have them," coolly replied the youth. "You will save trouble, Captain Scroggins, by handing them over to the police."

"I tell yer there ain't no persons on this craft except my regular crew," blustered the skipper.

"You are not telling the truth. I saw three old acquaintances of mine in your cabin not two hours ago."

"When yer was spying down my skylight, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, they went ashore before we left the anchorage."

Could this be true? Tom hesitated for one brief moment, and then the remembrance of the compact made in the cabin returned to him. No; Nicholas Flint and his companions must be on board.

"I don't believe you, captain. I know that you have the criminals hidden in some part of the vessel. Produce them, or it will be the worse for you."

"I tell ye I ain't got them, and that settles it, boy. The best thing you can do is to call yer blamed tug alongside and leave this hooker," replied the skipper.

Tom saw that but little good would come from the present argument, and he resolved to act decisively without further delay.

A hasty glance around showed that they were well past the Narrows and rapidly making for the open sea. A rift in the sullen clouds overhead had permitted the rays of a full moon to percolate down upon the scene.

By its aid Tom saw that the tug had again crept up to within seven or eight yards of the gangway. On her forward deck stood the police and Professor Pickle.

The latter was gesticulating to the sergeant, evidently begging him to proceed to action.

The decks of the bark were singularly clear of men, only one solitary sailor being in view near the forecastle. Of Nicholas Flint and the others not a sign could be seen.

"If the police patrol boat would only appear we'd have this craft searched in a jiffy," muttered Tom, turning to glance astern.

As he did so a figure darted out from the shadows of the after companionway and sprang upon him. Tom was completely taken unawares. The shock of the encounter caused him to reel backward, and in an instant Captain Scroggins had grasped him by the throat.

There was a short struggle, the three combatants surged back and forth over the slippery deck, and then one of them broke away and ran to the port gangway.

It was Tom.

By his agility he had managed to wrest himself free from his assailants, but he was still in great danger. In the scrimmage the revolver had been knocked from his hand, rendering him entirely defenseless. In the excitement of the struggle Tom had failed to recognize the newcomer. He now saw that it was his old-time enemy—Rufus Kane.

The presence of the latter proved conclusively that Scroggins had not told the truth. The three conspirators were still on the bark.

Panting from his exertion, Tom climbed upon the port railing, and prepared to defend himself. He saw the skipper and Rufus rush to the ladder leading down to the

main deck, and then make for him at the top of their speed.

The sailor near the forecastle also came hurrying aft. He held a heavy iron belaying-pin in one hand, evidently intending to use it when an opportunity presented itself.

Tom saw at once that he could not hope to contend successfully with such an array of forces. Glancing about, he noticed a stout rope leading from the end of the main yardarm to the pin rail beneath his feet.

Hastily stooping over, he loosened the rope, and just as Scroggins and his companions rushed up, Tom launched himself through the air toward the nearby tug!

Luckily, one of the policemen—an intelligent fellow—had seen the maneuver in time to spring forward. He reached the spot just in front of the pilot house as Tom came whirling over the rail.

Opening his arms the policeman grasped the youth, and together they tumbled upon the deck, breathless but safe.

A hoarse cry of baffled fury came from the skipper of the *Nighthawk*, then his voice was heard giving the order to make sail. In a very few moments the bark was covered with canvas, which, spread to a strong breeze, blowing from off the quarter, sent her surging through the water.

Springing to his feet, Tom looked ahead, and saw that

the tug which had been towing the bark was now free. The towing hawser had been cast off, and the vessel was now under her own sails.

The professor joined him, trembling with excitement.

"Thank Heaven, you are safe, Thomas!" he cried, grasping the youth's hand.

"It was a close call, sir," replied Tom, smiling. "They came pretty near catching me that time."

"You are a plucky fellow, I must say, young man," said the sergeant of police, coming up.

"If you had been more so, we'd have caught those scoundrels," muttered our hero.

The officer overheard him, and reddened, but he refrained from replying.

"I suppose we will have to give up the chase," remarked the professor, impotently shaking his fist after the rapidly-disappearing bark.

"Yes, we can't do anything with the force we have," replied Tom. "If the police boat had joined us we would have captured them. We might as well return to Staten Island now."

The tug captain was given the necessary instructions, and within a couple of hours Tom and the professor were again on board the yacht. The escape of Nicholas Flint and his companions was a sore disappointment, but when the three friends talked over the matter that night they

found some satisfaction in the fact that their enemies were out of the country.

"I guess we'll run across them down South, somewhere," remarked Chester.

"I hope so," replied our hero, grimly.

"It is fortunate we purchased those two Maxim guns, and the six-pounder," said Professor Pickle, thoughtfully.

"We may have trouble, so it is well to be prepared for it."

Thoroughly tired out by the excitement of the previous twelve hours, Tom and his companions retired to rest. They were up bright and early the following day. There was much to do, and all three set to work at once.

The professor returned to the city for the purpose of arranging his affairs before the final departure. Tom accompanied him as far as the ferry landing in New York, while Chester remained on board to receive the stores.

Our hero went direct to a certain resort on South Street, where sea captains congregate. He mentioned his desire to engage a sailing master for an extended trip to southern latitudes, and in a brief space of time had half a dozen old skippers surrounding him.

Selecting one—a bronzed, stalwart mariner named Silas Brett—he bade him report on board the yacht at once with his outfit.

"I can't give you much time," added Tom, with a smile. "We leave to-morrow at daybreak."

"Time enough, sir," replied Brett. "I have been moored here for nigh onto five months, and I'd set sail this minute, if necessary."

Grasping the opportunity, Tom made a flying visit up-town to a certain residence not far from the park. He found Violet at home, and, after announcing his early departure, reluctantly left for the yacht, taking Mary Ann's best wishes with him.

The following morning the *Explorer* spread her white wings, and passed out through the Narrows, bound on her long voyage to southern seas. The new sailing master proved expert at his profession, and handled the craft in a thorough manner.

Nothing of interest occurred during the trip to Cape Town. Day after day came and went, with an interminable monotony of sea and sky. The tropics were reached in due course, and for several days the yacht sweltered under a burning sun, with no breeze to send her on her course. Then the trade winds appeared, and wafted by these, the *Explorer* finally sailed into Table Bay, dropping anchor in front of Cape Town.

Tom lost little time in going ashore. He had the address of Violet's relative, and proceeded straight to the office mentioned. Making himself known, he asked if the young lady had arrived at the Cape in good health.

"I am sorry to tell you, young man, that she hasn't reached here yet," replied Mr. Dodge, Violet's uncle.

"What? Not arrived yet?" exclaimed Tom, in surprise. "Why, she was to leave New York sixty days ago to-day."

"And she did leave. I have received a telegram to that effect, but the steamer is greatly overdue. There are grave doubts concerning her safety. I was just going to the steamship office to inquire for news. Come with me."

Greatly depressed by the startling and totally unexpected news, Tom followed Mr. Dodge from the office.

On reaching the street, he saw Chester Gage just turning an adjacent corner. The lad was running, and seemed to be laboring under intense excitement.

CHAPTER VII.

"BURNED TO THE WATER'S EDGE."

When Tom saw Chester turning the corner in such haste, he knew by his air of excitement that something extraordinary must have happened, but he did not anticipate the wonderful tidings his chum bore.

Hurrying forward to meet Chester, he asked:

"What is up, Chester? Any important news?"

"News enough, Tom," gasped Gage, breathing heavily. "The *Nighthawk* has just sailed into port, and I saw Mary Ann on board."

"What?"

Tom stared at his friend in blank amazement. The statement that the Irishwoman—Violet's maid—was on board the *Nighthawk* was simply beyond credence.

"You must be dreaming, Chester," Tom said, finally. "Why, Mary Ann is a passenger on a steamer bound for this port from Liverpool."

"I can't help that," doggedly replied Gage. "I saw her standing near the after-cabin of Captain Scroggins' bark not an hour ago."

"It is utterly impossible," still insisted Tom. "You have made a mistake. Probably it was some other

woman, but what any female would be doing on board the bark is beyond me. The *Nighthawk* did not have any passengers when she left New York, that’s certain.”

“I tell you it was Mary Ann. Professor Pickle and I were standing aft on the yacht when Captain Brett called out from forward that an American bark was rounding the point,” explained Chester. “I picked up a telescope and saw at once that the approaching vessel was the *Nighthawk*. Just then those on board must have recognized the *Explorer*, as she wore around and stood to sea again in a hurry.”

“What! Has the bark again left port?”

“Yes. Captain Scroggins no doubt knew that he would be hauled up for his actions in New York Harbor. Well, just as they went on the other tack, I saw a woman rush from the cabin and wave her arms wildly. The distance was not too great for me to easily recognize Mary Ann, and I can tell you, the discovery fairly staggered me. Taking a boat, I came ashore at once to tell you about it.”

“This is simply wonderful,” exclaimed Tom. “I don’t know how it could happen without—yes, that must be it! Chester, something terrible has undoubtedly occurred.”

Tom rapidly explained the news he had just received from Mr. Dodge concerning the non-arrival of the steamer, and then hurriedly joining the latter gentleman—

who had remained near his office—our hero acquainted him with the later intelligence brought by Chester.

"You say this woman is Violet's maid?" asked Mr. Dodge, gravely.

"Yes, and she undoubtedly left the United States with your niece."

"If there is no mistake in the matter, this places a very serious aspect upon the tardiness of the steamer. Come with me to the steamship office, and we will make inquiries."

Accompanied by Chester, they hastened toward the harbor front, and while on the way chanced to pass the office of a local newspaper.

A crowd had gathered before the window, evidently intent on reading a large placard posted up within plain view.

With a vague sinking at the heart, Tom stopped a man coming from the locality and asked of him the news.

"Steamer from Liverpool burned at sea; a number of lives lost," laconically replied the citizen, hurrying off to carry the intelligence elsewhere.

Joining the increasing crowd, Tom and his companions read in staring headlines:

BURNED TO THE WATER'S EDGE!

LOSS OF THE STEAMER GANGES RIVER AT SEA!

*Great Destruction of Human Life!..But Few Escape!
Full Particulars in Our Extra, Just Out!*

"Great heavens!" groaned Mr. Dodge, "that is the name of the vessel on which Violet sailed from Liverpool."

Tom gazed at the placard in silence, but his white face and set teeth proclaimed the emotion under which he was laboring.

Darting into the office, Chester secured a paper, and immediately returned to the others.

"It don't give many details," he said, hastily scanning the sheet. "It says that a telegram was received this morning from a small port thirty miles up the coast giving the news of the burning of the *Ganges River* last night off that port. It also states that a bark, name unknown, rescued a couple of ladies from a raft."

"A couple of ladies!" exclaimed Tom, eagerly. "Why, then, the *Nighthawk* must have also picked up Violet."

"Very probable," replied Mr. Dodge. "But didn't you say that the vessel put to sea without having communicated with the shore?"

"Yes; the captain was afraid to anchor because of our presence here. He probably expected to reach Cape Town before we did."

"Where can he go?" asked Chester. "He must be short of provisions and water, because he left New York in a hurry."

"There are several ports near here," replied Mr. Dodge.

"It is my impression he will stand on and off until we

leave, and then sneak in for the purpose of landing his passengers," said Tom, reflectively.

"I'll bet a dollar he'll be glad to get rid of Mary Ann," chuckled Gage. "When she sees Nicholas Flint and Rufus Kane, there will be war on that hooker."

"We are wasting time here," suddenly said Tom. "We must not permit them to get too great a start."

"Are you going to follow them with the yacht?" asked Chester, as the little party hastened toward the water front.

"No; I will charter a steamer if it is possible. Do you know of any vessel in port that we could get?"

The latter question was addressed to Mr. Dodge, who, after thinking for a moment, slowly shook his head and replied:

"I don't know of any. The regular passenger steamer running to England is here, but she sails to-night."

"Couldn't we charter her for a couple of days?"

"No; she carries the mails, and her agents could not delay them without some very serious cause."

"I wish there was an American man-of-war here. The officers would like nothing better than a chase at sea."

"We haven't seen the American flag in this port, except on a whaler or merchant ship, for over a year," replied Violet's uncle. "Several English warships were

in here last week, but they are now cruising on the west coast.”

A call was made to a shipping office. The man in charge stated that not one vessel was available for such a trip.

“Never mind,” said Tom, as they left the office, “the *Explorer* is speedy and well armed. We will pursue the *Nighthawk* in the yacht.”

“It has just struck me that Nicholas Flint and his precious companion will try to keep Violet on board to get even with you,” suddenly remarked Chester.

“By George! I believe you are right, chum,” replied Tom. “It would be just like him. If he tries to play a game like that I’ll chase him around the world a dozen times.”

On reaching the wharf, Mr. Dodge stated that business matters would prevent him from accompanying them, but that he would keep a close watch for the bark and have her captured if she appeared anywhere along the coast.

Tom and Chester took a boat for the yacht, and within an hour the *Explorer* was standing to sea with every stitch of canvas spread to a favorable breeze.

CHAPTER VIII.

MARY ANN CONTROLS THE SITUATION.

Violet and Mary Ann left New York three days after the *Explorer's* departure. Their voyage to Liverpool was uneventful, with the exception of Mary Ann's intense desire to visit what she called "th' ould sod."

She remained on deck all one night, despite a heavy rain, to catch a glimpse of the green isle, and paid an enormous sum to a boatman in Liverpool for what the fellow assured her was the dried skin of the last snake banished by St. Patrick from Ireland.

After leaving England, all went well until the evening before the expected final day of the long voyage.

Just before eight o'clock fire was discovered in the after-hold, and, notwithstanding the strenuous efforts of the crew, the conflagration spread until it was deemed necessary to abandon the doomed craft.

In the rush and excitement several of the boats were capsized. The remaining number was not sufficient to hold all on board, and a wild scramble ensued for places.

Assisted by Violet—who in the emergency showed that she was a brave and true American girl—Mary Ann contrived to form a raft of hatch gratings.

Then, with life-preservers tied around their waists, they gave themselves up to the mercies of the deep.

The frail raft kept together until a vessel bore down in the darkness. Violet and her companion were finally rescued by the crew of the unknown bark, and the craft again set sail, seeing no other survivors.

It was not until they were fairly on board that Violet and Mary Ann discovered the identity of their rescuers.

The first person the Irish maid encountered after reaching the deck was Rufus Kane. The recognition was mutual, and the ex-bully of Pickle Academy gave a prolonged whoop of amazement.

"Well, I'll be hung if it ain't Mary Ann!" he cried. "And Violent Vaughn, too!"

"Saints presarve us!" screeched the former. "Violet, look! it's that red-headed rogue that tried to ruin Tom. Wirra, wirra! what have we fallen to, a-riding on the same ship with such cattle?"

Just then Nicholas Flint and Cyrus Holt emerged from the shadows of the mainmast.

The former carried a lantern, which he held so the rays would fall upon Violet.

"Ah, this is quite an agreeable surprise," he said, suavely. "We certainly did not expect to have the extreme pleasure of rescuing my late ward's lady friend to-night."

68 Mary Ann Controls the Situation.

"We are obliged to you," coldly replied Violet.

In her secret heart she would far rather have trusted to the raft for safety. She knew Nicholas Flint's history, and the bitterness of his hatred toward Tom.

In the meantime Cyrus Holt, in an uncouth attempt to be gallant, had seized Mary Ann's hand.

Jerking it away from him with a force that almost sent him sprawling, she gave the astounded man a resounding slap across the cheek. Then tossing her head, Mary Ann said, in a lofty tone, to her mistress:

"Come to th' cabin, dharling, an' lave thim brutes to thimsilves. It's honored they should be that we'd condescend to travel an their ould ship."

Suddenly interposing himself, Nicholas Flint said, roughly:

"Keep a civil tongue in your head, woman, or we'll give you a taste of our discipline, do you understand that?"

"Yis," replied Mary Ann, with dangerous calmness.

"Well, you will both remain here until we decide what to do with you."

"We are to wait here, eh?"

"Yes."

"We can't widdraw to th' cabin out of th' cold, eh?"

"Not until I see the captain. He is in his room ill, and——"

Nicholas Flint was suddenly interrupted by a maudlin

shout from the after deck, and Captain Scroggins' burly form came staggering toward the gangway.

"What's this—this I hear 'bout burning steamer and—and people being picked up, eh?" he stammered. "Don't want any—any people to feed, d'ye hear? Got enough already. Running short provisions and—and——"

At that moment the bark gave a lurch, and the redoubtable skipper reeled to leeward, bringing up in the scuppers on all fours.

He was assisted to his feet by one of the crew, who received a treacherous kick for his reward. Then, staggering up to the group near the side, the skipper suddenly espied Mary Ann.

"What!" he roared, rubbing his eyes in amazement. "Why, it's women as has been saved from the briny, eh? Blast me, if it ain't. How-de-do, Mrs. Wot-yer-name? Glad to—to see you, I'm sure."

Lurching over, he attempted to shake hands with the Irishwoman. That was the last straw. Already boiling over with rage at Nicholas Flint's insolence, Mary Ann exploded.

Giving vent to a whoop that rang through the ship, she pounced upon the startled skipper and clawed his face with her sharp nails until he fairly howled for mercy.

"We are lone females in th' hands of the inimy," she shouted, emphasizing each word with an extra scratch,

"but it's meself as is not afraid of any man that walks an two legs."

Leaving Scroggins completely vanquished, Mary Ann darted toward Nicholas Flint, and before he could escape, she had clutched him by his whiskers.

"We'll wait yer pleasure out here, eh?" she asked, tugging away at the hair. "It's yerself as wants to discipline me, is it? Ooh! yer ould brute, Ol'll tache ye to respect Mary Ann if it takes me all night."

"Help, murder! take her off, some one!" cried her victim, struggling in her hands like an infant.

The ex-cook of Simper Seminary was heculean in her strength and entirely guiltless of fear. Her anger had been aroused by the shabby treatment accorded Violet and herself, and she resolved to settle the question then and there.

She also remembered the trouble caused her favorite, Tom Truxton, by his enemies, and the latent flame of revenge again burst forth.

Giving Nicholas Flint a toss that sent him stumbling over the skipper, Mary Ann glared around for fresh victims.

The deck was clear.

Warned by their companions' fate, Cyrus Holt and Rufus Kane had taken refuge in flight. Hastily climbing

the main shrouds, they perched themselves upon the rat-lines and peered down in fear and trembling.

The half dozen sailors had also retreated to a safe distance, where they stood convulsed with laughter at the plight of their brutal skipper.

Placing her arms akimbo, Mary Ann abused every one within hearing collectively and individually until her voice failed; then taking Violet by the arm, she marched aft with great dignity.

After entering the cabin, she locked all the doors, and seated herself so as to command every entrance.

"Don't ye worry, dharling," she said to Violet who was quietly crying from the reaction. "Just go to slape, that's a dear. If thim brutes try to come here Oi'll folly up the lesson already comminced."

Twenty minutes later a timid knock sounded at the door leading out on the deck.

"Wot do ye be wantin'?" called out Mary Ann, fiercely.

"We would like to get our blankets," quaved the voice of Captain Scroggins from a distance.

"Ye can't have thim."

"But it's cold out on deck."

"Phy shouldn't it be? Go an, now, and don't be bothering us. Ye'll git in whin we reach Cape Town, and not a minute before."

"Open the door, ye old vixen, or I'll break it down," suddenly shouted the skipper, becoming bold.

Mary Ann sprang from her seat, but before she could reach the entrance, the sound of rapidly retreating footsteps was heard on deck. The captain had evidently thought better of his proposition.

Mary Ann remained on watch all night, Violet sleeping fitfully on one of the cushioned transoms. Shortly after daybreak the *Nighthawk* sailed around the western point of Table Bay, only to find Tom's yacht riding at anchor off the town.

Captain Scroggins and his companions knew perfectly well that to remain meant certain arrest, so they reluctantly put to sea again, with the intention of hovering about the port until the *Explorer* departed.

Violet and Mary Ann saw the maneuver, but they were powerless to prevent it. The Irish maid hastened on deck in time to wave her arms toward the yacht. Her keen eyes told her that she had succeeded in attracting attention, and she again retired to give the cheering intelligence to her young mistress.

"We'll soon be beyant the power av these brutes, dharling," she said. "Tom will niver rist ontill he has ye safe, moind that. We've lashings av grub and water inside here, and all we nade to do is to wait developments."

CHAPTER IX.

THE CHASE.

In the meantime the yacht with her eager crew was beating back and forth in the open waters outside of Table Bay, anxiously waiting for a chance to sight the bark.

Several precious hours had elapsed before the anchor was hoisted, so when the *Explorer* finally cleared the land, not a trace of the *Nighthawk* was visible.

"She must call in somewhere before long," said Tom, taking great consolation from the fact. "They are undoubtedly short of both provisions and water after their seventy-day trip."

"There are only two places around here where they can get stores," replied Captain Brett. "One is up the coast, and the other is around toward the west."

"That complicates matters exceedingly," remarked the professor. "It makes us absolutely uncertain of the direction they have taken. This delay is very annoying. I wanted to sail for the unknown island to-night or in the morning at least."

"That is now out of the question, professor," replied Tom, with determination. "Our first duty is to rescue Violet and Mary Ann from the clutches of those scoun-

drels. When that is accomplished, we will proceed with the expedition."

Giving a sigh of resignation, Professor Pickle withdrew to his private cabin, where he soon forgot his troubles in a recent work on botany.

Tom and Chester went aloft with powerful glasses and kept a close watch on the surrounding waters until late in the afternoon. Then, just as they were preparing to descend for a light lunch, the former espied the topsail of a vessel above the edge of the eastern horizon.

"Deck ahoy!" he instantly shouted. "Sail on the port quarter. Ware and stand for it at once."

"I'll bet it is the *Nighthawk*!" exclaimed Chester, jubilantly. "They have stood out to sea for several miles and are now returning to reconnoiter."

Descending to the deck, Tom ordered every sail set that would draw. During the long voyage from New York both he and Chester had taken practical lessons in seamanship and navigation, with such good results that either could take charge of the yacht in ordinary weather.

They now turned to with a vim and assisted the crew in spreading the canvas. The fore and mainsails were set, together with the different staysails and jibs. To increase their drawing power, Tom ordered water thrown upon each canvas.

"If she don't sight us too soon we'll have a chance," he said to Chester.

"The weather looks squally, and night is not far off," replied the latter, dubiously. "It is my opinion we'll be extremely lucky if we get anywhere near the bark."

"What do you think of the weather, captain?" Tom asked Brett.

The old skipper squinted aloft and then slowly swept the heavens with his experienced eye. Shaking his head, he replied:

"Looks as if we are going to have a stormy night, sir. There is a heaviness in the air what speaks of rain, if nothing more. Ye can't allus sometimes tell in these here latitudes, however. I have seen thunder come from a clear sky to the east'ard of the cape, and one night, about ten years ago, it began to pour down bits of cinders and dust until we had a deck load in half a minute."

"Must have come from some volcano in action," suggested Tom.

"I dunno. The nearest mountain was on the island of Java, about two thousand miles from our position at that time. Howsomever, that ain't the question just now. If I'm not mistaken that there bark is going to tack."

Grasping a spyglass, Tom eagerly leveled it at the distant vessel, and saw that Brett was right. Even as he

looked the bark came slowly around to the wind and then edged away in the opposite direction.

"They have made us out," exclaimed Tom, excitedly. "They are crowding on sail and are standing away from us."

"Now for a chase," shouted Chester, giving his cap a toss in the air. "They haven't more than four or five miles the best of us, and the *Explorer* ought to lessen that without any trouble."

"The bark is a fast sailer, young man," remarked the skipper, dubiously. "Ye must remember that she made as quick time from the United States as we."

"Oh, I think we can overhaul her if we have time enough," said Tom. "If it was only morning instead of near sundown. I am afraid they will double on us during the night."

"Why not try a shot at her if we draw close enough before dark?" suggested Chester.

"Rip my topsail! but that's a splendid idea," exclaimed Captain Brett, enthusiastically. "Just slap a few shells into the bark's sides and they'll heave to quick enough."

"I don't want to do that, as there are ladies on board," replied our hero, thinking of Violet. "But we'll fire a couple of blank charges."

"It'll have no more effect on them than a pinch of snuff

on a brass monkey," snorted the skipper. "Can't ye trust to hulling her forward somewhere?"

"No; I won't take the risk," decided Tom. "But get the gun out of the hold at once, captain."

In the course of a half hour the six-pounder rapid-fire rifle was placed in position upon the forecastle and loaded with a blank shell.

By that time Brett had by careful observation with his sextant ascertained that the yacht was gaining on the bark. The distance between the two vessels had been lessened considerably and when Tom was ready to try his experiment, the *Nighthawk* was only three miles away.

"I believe I will fire a loaded shell," suddenly remarked Tom. "I think I can send one over their heads without any danger."

"It will have a far greater effect," coincided Chester. "It would be even better if you could hit the hull forward of the mainmast."

The rifle was quickly reloaded, and taking careful aim, Tom pulled the trigger. There was a loud report, the smoke cleared away, and then those on board the yacht uttered a hearty cheer.

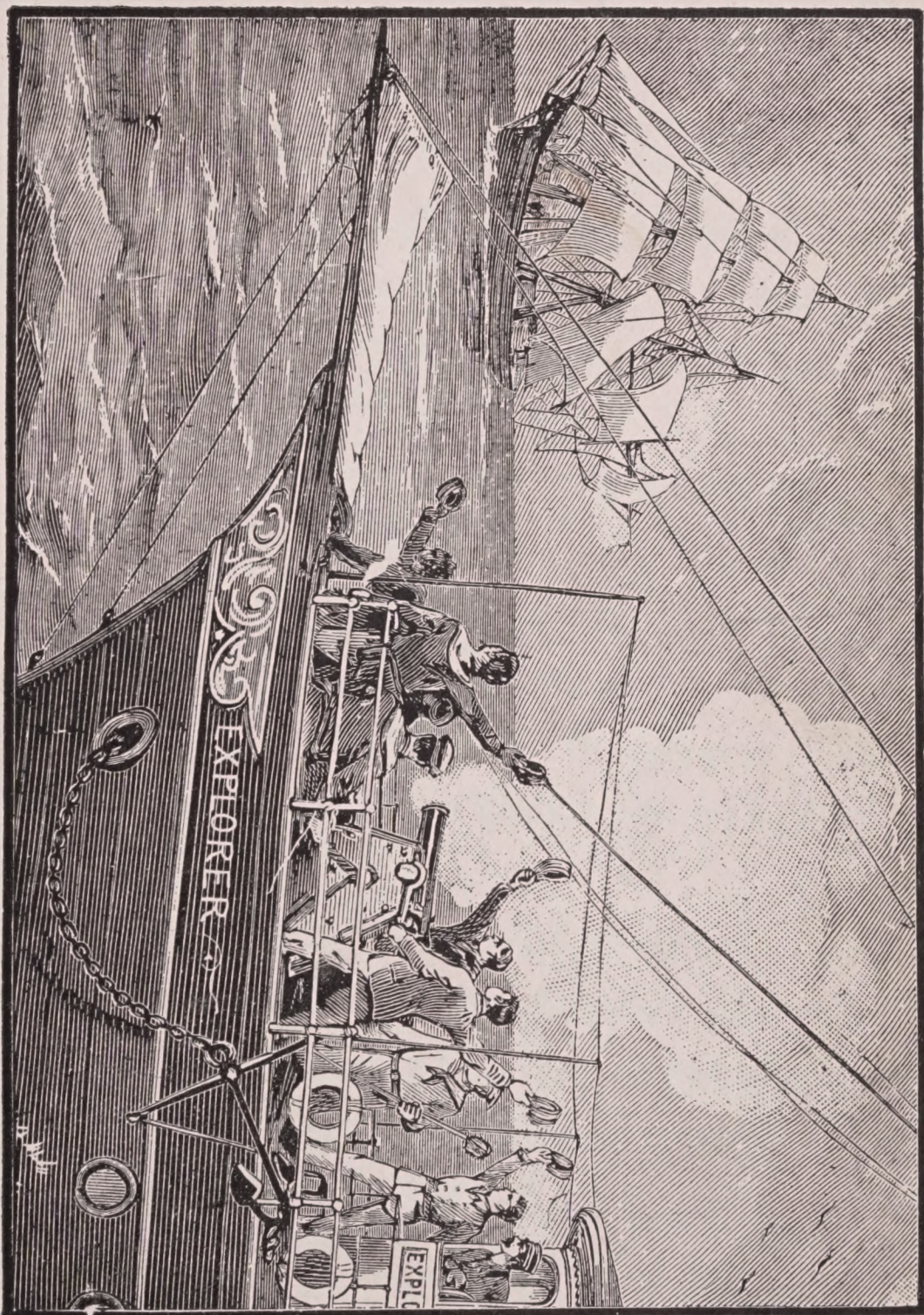
The result exceeded Tom's greatest anticipation.

The steersman on the bark abandoned the wheel in the sudden panic caused by the shot, and in less than a moment the vessel was taken aback.

Heeled over by the strong breeze, she rolled bulwark under, and if it had not been for the snapping of the main topmast, serious consequences might have resulted.

As it was the bark lost her headway for the time being. The delay was but brief, however. Men swarmed aloft, and in an incredibly short space of time the wreck of the topmast had been cleared away.

Before the yacht had covered much more than a mile, the *Nighthawk* was again under way. The chase had not yet ended.



“Tom pulled the trigger. There was a loud report, and when the smoke cleared away, those on board the yacht uttered a hearty cheer.”
(See page 77)

CHAPTER X.

PERIL THREATENS.

Tom muttered an exclamation of disappointment when he saw the bark again under sail. It meant a continuation of the pursuit and the prolongation of Violet's stay on board.

"Confound it! I have a notion to give them a dose of steel," he said, addressing Chester.

"Why don't you? Night is almost here, and if I am not mistaken we will have a fog before many minutes."

"You are right, my lad," remarked the skipper, pointing astern. "There comes a wet blanket for us, or I am a lawyer."

Tom glanced at the wall of mist rapidly rolling toward them, then gave orders to load the rifle with a solid shot. After taking a long and very careful aim at the extreme upper part of the mainmast, he discharged the gun.

"A good line shot, but it didn't do much damage," cried Chester, peering through a spyglass. "You have again aroused them up, though. There goes the man at the wheel—ah! another one has taken his place, and it looks like Scroggins. I can see old Flint and Cyrus Holt stand-

ing near the mizzenmast. They are shaking their fists toward us."

Before Tom had time to fire another shot, the fog closed down on them, and pursuer and pursued were as completely hidden from each other as if a solid wall had been built between them.

When the first gun was fired the professor popped on deck with his precious book under his arm. He now took an active part in the chase, spurred on, no doubt, by the annoying prospect of delay to the expedition.

At his suggestion the yacht's bow was turned in the direction of Table Bay, and part of the canvas furled.

"Our wisest plan is to guard the port," he added. "I think they will try to steal in and secure stores, expecting us to remain outside looking for them."

"Well, if they do that, we'll fool them," said Chester, grimly.

"If they don't bamboozle us first," added Captain Brett. "Them people are smart, and good sailors. The way they cleared the wreck of that main topmast proves that."

"I believe the fog is lifting," suddenly cried Tom. "Ah! you can make out the hull of the bark."

"By Jove! they are standing toward us," exclaimed Chester. "There they go on the other tack—they have seen the yacht."

"After them," Tom shouted excitedly. "Spread every stitch of canvas you can, Captain Brett."

"It's hardly safe, sir," replied the old skipper, gravely shaking his head. "We're liable to have a squall at any moment. This is a treacherous place down here, and——"

"They are out of sight again," interrupted the professor. "The fog has closed down once more."

The heavy curtain of mist which had risen slightly above the water now settled more thickly than before. The gathering darkness was also becoming more apparent, and it seemed evident that the chase would be a game of hide and seek in earnest.

The yacht was kept under shortened sail, and a course steered for Table Bay. A half hour later a strong breeze began to blow from the west, increasing finally into a gale.

The fog disappeared, but the gloom of night enshrouded the sea so densely that not a sign of the bark could be distinguished.

Muffled in oilskins, Tom and Chester paced the quarter-deck with the skipper, conversing as well as the tumult of the storm permitted. The *Explorer* was staggering along under double-reefed mainsail and jib, making heavy weather of it.

"I reckon we'd better run in and anchor until this here gale blows over," roared Captain Brett, placing his mouth close to Tom's ear.

"All right; do as you think best," replied the youth in the same tone.

"It kinder feels like a squall I once 'sperienced in the China Sea. It was what they call an electrical storm, and I can tell ye the pranks the lightning played around our hooker was a caution. We was struck thirteen times and when it was over our lightning rods lay around the decks all melted——"

The garrulous skipper's description was suddenly interrupted in a most startling manner.

A flash of lightning so broad and vivid that it turned the black night into the bright glare of noonday sun shot athwart the sky, immediately followed by another of equal intensity.

Then there appeared at the extreme tip of the bowsprit a living ball of fire which rolled down to the fore-castle deck to be suddenly extinguished as it reached the fore-mast.

Before those standing aft could recover from their surprise, they were almost blinded by a dazzling light which appeared directly overhead.

Tom, who was standing near the starboard rail, caught a momentary glimpse of a reddish globe which fell with a hissing noise into the sea not ten feet away.

A resounding splash was heard by all, and then a huge cloud of steam arose from the spot.

The man at the wheel, terror-stricken, abandoned his station and fell prone upon the deck, where he lay quivering from fright. This left the yacht without a guiding hand, and in the space of a moment she spun around, forced over by the gale onto her beam-ends.

There was a sound of rending canvas, and the enormous mainsail was torn from the ring bolts, vanishing in the gloom to windward like a wraith of the sea.

Tom, who was thrown against the bulwarks at the first shock, managed to regain his feet, but not in time to prevent the disaster. Staggering aft, he grasped the wheel, and, aided by Captain Brett who reached the spot at the same moment, managed to work the imperiled yacht before the wind again.

Then, just as they were mentally congratulating themselves, a flash of lightning again illuminated the scene, exposing to view not a hundred yards distant the huge hull of the bark, bearing down upon them from off the quarter at a terrific speed!

CHAPTER XI.

ONE CONSOLATION.

The sudden appearance of the *Nighthawk* bearing down upon them was so entirely unexpected that Tom and Captain Brett were rendered spellbound for the moment.

The flash of lightning left the darkness more intense than before, but sight was not needed for the action that followed. Both Tom and his companion clawed at the wheel until the rudder-blocks became jammed, then they stood and held their breaths in dread expectation.

But the collision did not take place as anticipated.

Luckily the yacht had steerage-way, and she paid off just in time. With a roar and a surge the invisible craft shot past, carrying a swell that caused the *Explorer* to roll swiftly from side to side.

"By the great horn spoon!" came to Tom's ears from the old skipper. "May I never see York again if that there wasn't the narrowest escape this ancient mariner has ever experienced."

Tom gave a deep sigh of relief, but did not reply; the revulsion of feeling was too much for him.

A moment later Chester and the professor came creeping aft. The latter was speechless from excitement and

terror, and his youthful companion had lost his jovial spirits for the time being.

"Is—is the danger past?" at last asked Professor Pickle, placing one hand on Tom's shoulder as if for protection.

"Not while we stand here in idleness," replied our hero, trying to pierce the darkness in the direction taken by the bark.

"You are right, sir," spoke up the skipper.

Giving himself a shake, the old sailor strode forward, and his voice was soon heard issuing order after order to the seamen.

"I tell you I thought our last hour had come," remarked Gage, with a rather blank smile. "The appearance of those confounded lights and balls of fire sent a regiment of shivers chasing up and down my back. Then the bark must happen along and almost run into us. I'll bet a war whoop to an echo that the paint has all been scraped off on that side."

"The first was an imaginary danger, but the latter one was real enough," spoke up the professor. "The first light we saw was what is termed a Saint Elmo light, but I think the one that fell alongside must have been a small meteor."

"The 'ker-plunk' it gave when it struck the water seemed loud enough for a whole planet," replied Chester,

with his old-time laugh. "I guess if it had struck you on the head, professor, you would have seen the Milky Way."

At that juncture Captain Brett came aft and reported that only the storm trysail remained intact.

"The rest are either blown to ribbons or else carried away entirely," he added. "And I think the mainmast is sprung a little."

"That's bad," said Tom, gravely. "The gale don't seem to abate any, either. What do you advise?"

"Well, I don't like to have you give up the chase, sir," replied old Brett; "but we can't spread any canvas on that mast until it is repaired, and——"

"We will put back at once," interrupted Tom; then he added, with a sigh:

"We are certainly having hard luck. We can't work impossibilities, however. Send a man to the wheel, captain, and make the best of your way into Table Bay."

Crippled as the yacht was, progress was slow, and daylight appeared before the anchor was again dropped off Cape Town.

Nothing further had been seen of the *Nighthawk*, and Tom's anxiety became almost unbearable. He hastened ashore, and after acquainting Mr. Boyd with the latest news, again tried to charter a steamship, but without success.

To make matters worse, the shipwright for whom they

had sent reported that it would take at least forty-eight hours to repair the yacht. As it was entirely out of the question to sail without the work, he was given orders to proceed at once.

Nothing of interest occurred until the following day shortly after dinner. Tom moped about the deck or made frequent trips to the masthead for the purpose of watching the entrance of the bay.

Chester followed his chum around during the first few hours, and then left him in disgust. The professor seized the opportunity to go plant-hunting ashore, and Captain Brett busied himself taking in the required stores.

At the time mentioned, Tom chanced to observe a vessel standing for the harbor under full sail. Taking Chester and two men, he immediately rowed out to meet the stranger just after the anchor was dropped.

Hastily climbing on board, our hero asked the bronzed skipper if he had seen anything of a bark flying the American flag near the coast.

"Did she have a jury maintopmast?"

"Yes."

"And was her name the *Nighthawk*?"

"Yes, yes; did you meet her, sir?" eagerly questioned Tom.

"I reckon I did," replied the captain, with provoking calmness.

"Where, man?"

"About a hundred miles southeast of here. Why, what is the matter with her?"

Tom hastily explained.

"Rolling waves! you don't mean to tell me as how they have carried two females away, do ye?" ejaculated the captain. "Why, if I had known that I'd never have sold them any stores."

"Stores?" shouted Tom, aghast. "Did you supply——"

"Yes, I sold the blamed scoundrels almost all my provisions and water. They told me they were in a great hurry and hadn't no time to touch on the Cape, so as they offered me fancy prices I obleeged them."

Tom elevated his hands with a gesture of despair.

"You could not have done anything worse, sir," he replied, bitterly. "Now, it is a question whether we ever catch them or not."

"Did you see any signs of Miss Vaughn or her maid on board?" asked Chester.

"No; but I noticed that the cabin windows were all barricaded, which is something unusual."

"In which direction did they sail after leaving you?" Tom asked the skipper.

"About so'-so'-east."

Our hero gave his companion a meaning glance.

"Toward the island, eh?" whispered Chester.

Tom nodded. It was plainly evident to him that Captain Scroggins had gone in search of the mysterious land of the famous botanical plant without further delay, and had taken Violet and Mary Ann with him.

Only one course remained to be pursued, as he told Chester after they had left the bark, and that was to set sail at once in search of them.

"I think Captain Scroggins concluded it was impossible to land, so he seized the opportunity of obtaining stores from this vessel and then continued his voyage," he added. "I wouldn't have cared a rap for him or all the plants in the world if they only had left Violet in Cape Town."

"That is so," replied Chester, sympathetically.

Then he brightened up and added:

"You mustn't forget that Mary Ann is with her, old boy. That woman is a whole host in herself. I'd back her against Nicholas Flint and all his crew in strength and cunning."

"That is my one consolation," responded Tom, almost cheerfully.

On reaching the yacht they found that the shipwrights had worked to such good effect that it would be possible to

sail before midnight. Toward evening Professor Pickle returned with his arms full of specimens.

On being given the latest news by Tom, he replied, absent-mindedly :

“Good! Just exactly what I desired. Could not be better. Now——”

“What?” exclaimed our hero, indignantly. “Do you mean to say that you are glad to hear that Violet has been carried away?”

“No—no,” replied the professor, confusedly. “I am sorry that she was not landed by those scoundrels, but if they had to sail somewhere I would rather they’d go toward the island. We can now kill two birds with one stone, as it were—rescue your friends and obtain the specimens. They may be hard to find, but if we search the island carefully and look in all the moist spots, we’ll run across them sooner or later. From an artistic point of view they may be hideous, but——”

“What! Violet hideous?” exclaimed Tom, hotly.

“Violet? Who is talking about that young lady?” replied the professor, in surprise. “I mean the specimens of the genus *Allium*, sir.”

“Oh, that’s different,” answered our hero, with a laugh. “I thought it would be rather a peculiar idea to look for Violet and Mary Ann in the moist spots on the island.”

Peace being restored, Tom turned his attention to the various preparations for leaving port. Shortly after eleven the anchor was weighed, and the *Explorer* again sailed from Table Bay, this time on a voyage which was destined to prove one of great peril to Tom and his friends.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ICEBERG.

"I tell ye I have carefully searched every chart on board, and I can't see the slightest trace of an island in these seas," remarked Captain Brett to Tom, one evening about a week after leaving Cape Town.

"But Scroggins certainly ran across it," replied that youth, emphatically.

"It's not known to navigators, anyway."

"That may be, as he stated that it was almost two thousand miles from the Cape, in a southeasterly direction."

The old skipper shook his head doubtfully.

"It was an iceberg, then," he said, "which reminds me that we may sight ice before long. I think I'll put on a double watch to-night. In these latitoods there is no telling when you'll meet a berg or one of them pesky fields floating around. I remember——"

He suddenly ceased speaking and sniffed the air in a suspicious manner.

"What is the matter?" asked Tom.

"If my old smeller hasn't gone back on me I'll bet there is ice not far off," replied Captain Brett, uneasily.

"Hadn't we better take in sail?" queried Chester, who was standing near.

Just then a wild shout of alarm came from the lookout on the forecastle:

"Hard aport! Hard aport! There's ice dead ahead!"

"Great Jones! I knew it!" cried the skipper, huskily.

Darting aft he hurled himself upon the wheel, and, aided by the seaman on duty there, sent the spokes spinning from left to right at lightning speed.

At the same moment Tom—quick to see their danger—cast off the main sheet, causing the huge sail to flap free.

Chester was equally alert, doing a like service forward, and the yacht whirled around and came up to the wind with a suddenness that sent her heeling over until the lee rail was level with the water.

Immediately following came a sudden grinding noise, and then the long bowsprit snapped off close to the heel with a sharp report like that of a pistol.

"Jumping Jerusalem! We've struck a berg!" shouted Tom, running forward.

He had hardly reached the break of the forecastle when, with a crash, a white mass of ice fell from above, striking the deck not three feet from him.

"Are you hurt, Tom?" asked Chester, anxiously.

"No, but it was a very narrow escape," replied our hero.

"Where is the professor?"

Before Gage could answer, a figure darted from the cabin hatch and ran toward them. Stumbling against fragments of ice, it fell sprawling upon the deck.

"There he is, I'll bet a dollar," said Chester, chuckling despite the gravity of their situation.

"What is the matter? Have we reached the island? Can I go ashore now?" came in short, jerky words from Professor Pickle, as he scrambled to his feet.

Just then Captain Brett came toward them, puffing and blowing from his exertions. He appeared greatly excited, and made the alarming announcement that the yacht was hard and fast.

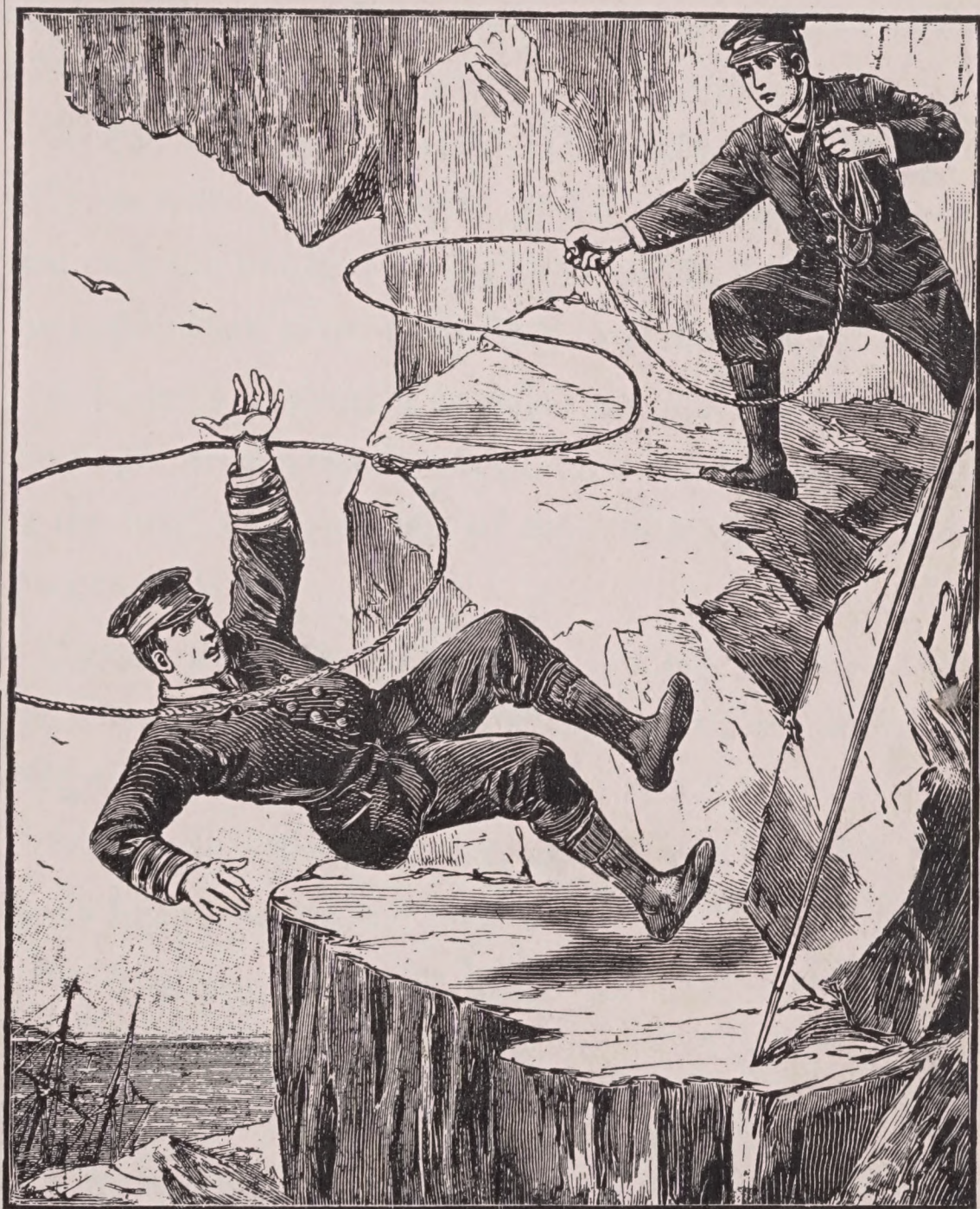
"We have run into a field of ice or something," he added, "and I believe we are stuck on a partially submerged piece. You can tell from the fact that the yacht is still listed to port."

"It must be a berg," replied Tom, "as several fragments have already fallen from aloft."

"If it was only daylight we could tell where we are," said Chester.

"Why not start a flare on the forecastle?" suggested Tom.

The idea was immediately carried into execution, and a moment later a bright glare illuminated the scene from a huge wood fire built upon a sheet of iron near the foremast.



“ By a quick movement, Gage cast the loop in such a manner that it encircled Tom’s shoulders.”

(See page 103)



Aft and on the starboard side nothing but the open sea could be distinguished, but ahead and on the port bow a steely white mass of ice arose far above the masts of the *Explorer*.

It was as Tom had said. The yacht had come into collision with a huge iceberg, and it was plainly apparent that only the sudden sheering of the craft, in obedience to the rudder, had saved them from total destruction.

A closer examination revealed the alarming fact that the *Explorer* was tightly wedged in a crack in the icy wall of the berg, the after part of the hull being upon a submerged shelf.

Captain Brett's face was pale in the bright glare of the fire when he turned to Tom, and gave him the above intelligence.

"We are in a pretty bad fix, sir," he said, gravely. "As far as I can now see, the yacht is done for."

"Is it as bad as that?" asked our hero. "Don't you think we can float her again?"

"I am afraid not. We struck the berg a slanting blow just where the ice sloped up from the water's surface, and the force sent us onto this shelf."

"What can we do, oh! what can we do now?" moaned the professor, wringing his hands in despair. "Can't we go ahead in the small boats and find the island? Just

think of being this near to the place where I expected and hoped to find innumerable specimens of the——”

“Oh! confound the blamed old onions!” exclaimed Chester, forgetting the respect due the scientist in the excitement of the moment. “If we escape with our lives we’ll be lucky, let alone finding any genus *Alliums* or such trash.”

“I guess you are about right, chum,” said Tom, with a grim smile. “If we don’t succeed in freeing the poor *Explorer* from her icy fetters we’ll have a hard tussle getting back to civilization.”

“It is a mercy that our boats were not smashed,” spoke up the old skipper. “If the worst comes we’ll have to trust our lives to them. Howsomever, we can’t say what’s what till daylight lends us a hand. If ye take my advice ye’ll all pile into the cabin, out o’ the way of falling ice. I see that some of the pinnacles are hanging directly over us, and the least thing’ll cause them to drap.”

The warning caused the professor to beat a hasty retreat to his room, where he was observed shortly afterward buried in his books.

“Just as soon as the sun appears we must make a thorough inspection of our position,” said Tom, after they had entered the cabin. “I have an idea that we may be able to do something with powder.”

“Blast away the shelf?” asked Chester.

"Yes, if it be possible. The only danger we need fear is that the shock may cause a fall of ice sufficient to crush or seriously damage the craft."

"It is a good scheme, sir," said Captain Brett, "and I think it'll work. The yacht is still whole, not making a drap o' water, and the spars are sound as a dollar, barring the bowsprit. We can easily rig one o' them."

It was a long and anxious wait until daylight. None slept except Professor Pickle, who was so deeply engrossed in his scientific studies that he really did not realize their danger.

At last a grayish light crept through the little apartment, proclaiming the coming of dawn. At the first sign, Tom and his companions went on deck and looked about them.

The scene presented to their gaze was impressive.

Close on the port bow a huge wall of ice towered above the yacht at least two hundred feet. Crevices and pinnacles, glittering spurs of transparent ice, and hummocks and knolls of snow barred their way in front, while astern stretched a calm expanse of sea as far as the eye could reach

CHAPTER XIII.

TOM MAKES A DISCOVERY.

Tom's first duty was to carefully examine the yacht's position. Together with Chester and the skipper, he sounded the depth of water from bow to stern, finding an average of barely seven feet both fore and aft.

As seen in broad daylight, their situation was not so grave. The icy shelf upon which the *Explorer* had run only extended a few feet astern, and those on board felt their spirits rise when they observed the apparent ease with which the shelf could be destroyed.

As Tom had stated, the greatest danger to be apprehended was from the overhanging precipices of ice looming menacingly overhead. One of these spurs hung directly above the quarter-deck, and seemed to be of many tons weight.

"If that ever takes a notion to fall, it'll be good-by yacht," remarked Chester, rather seriously.

"Ye're right there, lad," replied Captain Brett; "but we've got to take the risk, or leave the *Explorer* here."

"I'm going to climb up and examine it," suddenly spoke up Tom.

"And I am with you," joined in Gage. "If we only had our skates we could take a spin, eh?"

"We will leave that sport until we reach home," replied Tom, grimly. "If you are coming with me, chum, just drop your fun and attend to business. I am not going up there for pleasure nor for the view."

After administering this rebuke to Chester, who simply noticed it with a good-natured grin, Tom improvised an alpenstock from a long pole and a spike, and then set forth with his friend.

The impending journey was not devoid of peril by any means, and our hero proceeded with extreme caution. Both he and Chester had covered their shoes with coarse woolen stockings, which prevented them from slipping, and each was provided with a short coil of rope.

From the railing to the nearest point of ice was only four or five feet. As it was on the same level as the deck, a plank was placed across the space, and the two youths passed it in safety.

Pausing for a moment, they waved their hands to the professor and Captain Brett, and then began the ascent to the top of the berg.

"This is like climbing the Matterhorn, Tom," gayly remarked Chester, hopping from point to point of the irregular surface. "It is more sport than I——"

"Crack!" went the fragment of ice upon which the

speaker had just stepped, and Gage found himself flat on his back, with a suddenness that deprived him of speech for a moment.

Tom hastened to his aid, and speedily had him upon his feet again.

"That'll teach you a lesson, young man," he said, chuckling at Chester's blank expression of disgust. "Come on now, and be more careful, or I'll send you back to the *Explorer*."

After shaking his fist at the old skipper, who was shouting with laughter on the quarter-deck of the yacht, the discomfited youth followed Tom up the almost perpendicular sides of the berg.

It was only by taking advantage of every projection and cranny that they were enabled to make any progress at all. In some places the masses of ice were loose, and the slightest touch would send them crashing down the sides of the berg to the water's edge.

After traveling for fifty or sixty feet, Tom called a halt on a narrow shelf.

"We will rest a moment, and prepare for the next stretch," he said; then, glancing down to where Professor Pickle was anxiously watching their efforts, he waved his hand, as a token that all was well.

"I wonder where the *Nighthawk* is by this time, chum?"

asked Chester, musingly. "She now has almost three days the start of us, you know."

Tom's brow clouded over at the recollection of Violet's situation, thus called up, and he did not reply for a brief period. At last he turned to his companion, and said, with evident emotion:

"Chester, I would willingly give everything I have on earth if Violet was free from those scoundrels, and safe in Cape Town."

"I sympathize with you, chum; but I can't help thinking that she is all right. So long as Mary Ann can swing that right arm of hers, old Flint and his crew will keep their distance, I'll bet a dollar. I have an idea that we will run across them before long, anyway. Night before last I dreamed that——"

"Oh, shut up!" interrupted Tom, impatiently. "Dreams don't count, confound you!"

"But this was a funny one," persisted Chester, laughingly. "I thought I saw Rufus Kane stretched out on the bark's forecastle, with Mary Ann dancing a hornpipe upon his neck, and Violet keeping time with——"

"That will do, young man," said Tom, hastily changing the subject. "We had better be moving. There will be lots to do this morning, and we don't want to waste any time starting to work."

"What will you do in case the yacht can't be freed from

her present fix?" asked Chester, rising to follow his companion.

The question caused Tom to step toward the edge of the shelf upon which they were standing. Thoughtfully glancing down to where the *Explorer* lay, partially careened on the ledge of ice, he replied:

"The only thing we can do, chum, is to trust to the small boats. I hardly think it will come to that, though. If we find that spur overhead solid enough, we will mine the shelf with sufficient powder to crack it."

"And if it is liable to fall?"

"Then we'll have to try to cut a channel with axes. There is still another danger to be feared."

"What?"

"Didn't you ever read of icebergs toppling over?"

"From the warm water undermining the base?"

"Yes. As the berg drifts into warm currents the submerged portion is eaten or melted away until at last the whole thing turns turtle, in obedience to the laws of gravitation."

"I hope this one doesn't act in that unpleasant manner until we leave it," replied Chester, glancing doubtfully at the massive bulk of ice above him.

"There is no telling," remarked Tom, sagely. "That is why I want to get away without delay."

While speaking, he started to leave the edge of the

shelf. As he turned, that part of the ice upon which he had been standing suddenly broke off and disappeared with a crash down the side of the berg.

With an exclamation of consternation, Tom attempted to leap away from the dangerous spot, but in doing so his foot slipped and he fell prostrate directly on the edge of the ledge.

He was partially stunned by the fall, and would undoubtedly have rolled to his death if Chester had not acted promptly.

Loosening the rope around his waist, by a quick movement, Gage cast the loop in such a manner that it encircled Tom's shoulders ; then, bracing himself against a projecting spur of ice, he speedily hauled his chum into safety.

For a moment neither could speak from agitation ; then Tom scrambled to his feet and held out his hand to Chester, saying brokenly :

"I owe my life to you, chum. If it had not been for your presence of mind I would have gone over as sure as fate."

"Don't mention it, old boy," replied Chester, wiping the perspiration from his face. "I am only trying to get square for the many times you performed a like service for me when we were at Pickle Academy. It was a deuced narrow escape, though. Are you going back or above?"

Tom concluded to carry out his original intention ; so, after a brief rest, they continued the ascent, reaching the topmost part of the berg without further mishap a quarter of an hour later.

Tom was slightly in advance when they finally neared the summit. Making a hasty examination of the mass of ice projecting over the yacht, he found to his joy that it was evidently very solid.

Satisfied on that point, he clambered higher up to obtain a view of the other side. Raising himself above the last obstructing pinnacle of ice, he glanced over, and then, with a startled cry of surprise trembling upon his lips, turned and eagerly beckoned to Chester.

CHAPTER XIV.

MARY ANN FIGHTS FOR LIBERTY.

"Chester! Chester! come here," cried Tom, acting as if he was almost beside himself with amazement and joy. "Did anything ever happen more wonderful than this?"

His chum's evident excitement caused Gage to hurry over the irregular icy surface at a speed that bade fair to bring an accident upon him. When he reached Tom's side, however, and looked down upon the scene toward which that youth was pointing, Chester felt amply repaid for his haste.

The sloping mass of ice led down to a tranquil sea, which stretched without a break to where, brought out clear and distinct by the morning sun, there lay a small island completely covered with waving palms.

Wonderful though it was, this peculiar discovery of a tropical land in the antarctic regions did not rivet the attention of Tom and his companion as did the sight of a bark lying motionless within a hundred yards of the shore.

Chester rubbed his eyes in bewilderment, and then exclaimed:

"J-e-rusalem! if it ain't the *Nighthawk*!"

"That's just what it is, glory to goodness!" replied

Tom, in the same tone. "The mercies of Providence have at last brought us together. Don't wait here, chum. Back to the yacht as fast as our legs can carry us."

"What are you going to do?" asked Gage, as he followed his companion down the slippery sides of the berg at a breakneck speed.

"Do? Why, I am going to board that craft this morning, if I have to float over on a raft. Just to think of it. The *Nighthawk* has been within a few miles of us all night, and we didn't know it."

"You can thank this iceberg for the discovery, old boy. If we hadn't run into it we might have passed the island during the night, and never a bit the wiser."

"That's a fact, Chester. The collision we have been bemoaning has worked us good, after all."

"I wonder if that is the island of the wonderful onion?" asked Gage, as they stopped to take a much-needed rest.

"It seems to be."

"We haven't reached the latitude mentioned by Captain Scroggins yet, have we?"

"Not by at least four hundred miles. That is no criterion, however. He may not have told the truth. Confound the onion! If I only succeed in rescuing Violet and Mary Ann from the clutches of those scoundrels, I'll be satisfied."

"But the professor won't."

"Well, he'll have to wait; that's all about it."

"What a strange thing it is, finding this island covered with palm trees. Christmas trees would be more like it. I can't understand it, can you, Tom?"

But our hero had started off again, eager to reach the yacht without delay. Chester followed at his heels, and in due time they climbed over the bulwarks of the *Explorer*.

The professor and Captain Brett met them on deck, and in a few hurried words Tom explained his wonderful discovery.

"A palm-covered island on the other side of this berg?" gasped the skipper, incredulously. "Great Jones! the thing ain't possible!"

"We saw it, without a doubt, not an hour ago," replied Chester.

Captain Brett glanced at the iceberg; then slowly shook his head.

"You have seen a mirage, young gentleman," he said, confidently. "I've had queer experiences with them things myself, and——"

"The island is there, captain," interrupted Tom, emphatically. "I would stake my life upon it."

At this juncture, Professor Pickle, who had been gazing at Tom in open-mouthed amazement, suddenly made a break for the cabin, and almost instantly reappeared, carrying a small botanical case.

"Where are you going?" asked Tom.

"Have a boat manned at once, please. I am going ashore, to search for the specimens of the genus *Allium*," he replied, hurriedly.

"I am afraid you'll have to wait a while," returned our hero, grimly.

"Wait? Why?"

"We must make certain preparations first, sir. It won't do to blunder into the hands of Nicholas Flint and his mates without we are well armed."

"But I don't want to go near the confounded bark," persisted Professor Pickle.

"But I do," replied Tom, with determination. "You can obtain the plants at any time, professor; but every moment Violet remains in the power of those ruffians she is subjected to just so much more peril. You know how bitterly the trio hate me, and they would do anything to gratify their revenge."

The professor looked disappointed; but he bowed to our hero's wishes, and steps were taken at once to form an expedition.

"Shall we try to free the yacht first, or use the small boats?" asked Captain Brett.

"It would take too much precious time to attempt the former plan," instantaneously replied Tom. "The *Ex-*

plorer is safe here for a while, without the berg breaks up. No; we will leave her here, and row to the bark."

"Are you going to take one of the rapid-fire guns?" asked Chester, suggestively.

"Yes, and plenty of small arms."

"Don't you think it would be a good idea to send one of the sailors to the top of the berg, to watch the bark while we are getting the boats out?"

"That's a good plan, chum," responded Tom, favoring his friend with an approving look.

A man was accordingly dispatched to the summit with a spyglass, and instructed to immediately acquaint those on board the yacht if any decisive move was made by the enemy.

Several of the *Explorer's* seamen had previously been man-of-war's-men, and they understood the system of "wig-wagging" as practiced in the navy. Knowing this, Tom selected one of them as the lookout, and gave him a small flag to use in communicating with the yacht.

After he had departed, all hands were set to work launching the two heavy boats. There was ample water over the submerged ledge to enable the small craft to float alongside.

When they had finally been placed overboard, one of the rifles was mounted, and provisions stowed away in case of need.

"We will leave the yacht under the care of Professor Pickle and four men," decided Tom. "Chester, you, Captain Brett, and the balance go with me."

Gage tossed his cap in the air in high glee.

"Bully for you, chum," he cried. "I was afraid you intended leaving me here."

"No; you are too valuable in a scrimmage," replied Tom, with a laugh. "Jump in all of you."

Just as they were on the point of embarking, one of the sailors ran aft with the intelligence that the lookout at the summit was signaling the yacht.

"Something is up," exclaimed Tom, anxiously. "What does he say?"

All watched the distant piece of bunting, as it waved from side to side in the skillful grasp of the ex-man-of-war's-man, with deep interest.

Presently the man on the *Explorer's* deck interpreted slowly:

"He says that a boat has just left the bark containing two women."

"What?"

"The largest one is rowing hard."

"Mary Ann," murmured Chester.

"They are making for the island. There seems to be great excitement on board the vessel. Another boat is being lowered and filled with men."

"Great grief! Mary Ann and Violet are trying to escape!" shouted Tom, wild with excitement. "Come——"

"They have overtaken the first boat," interrupted the sailor. "A stout man with whiskers tried to grab the gunwale, and was struck across the head by an oar in the hands of the larger woman. She has hit another one. They are backing away. The first boat is again pulling for the island."

"Hurrah for Mary Ann!" cheered Gage. "Didn't I tell you she was a dandy?"

Tom hurriedly cut short his enthusiasm with an order to embark. Ten minutes later the two boats, containing our hero and his companions, were skirting the iceberg on their way to the scene of action.

CHAPTER XV.

IN PURSUIT OF THE FUGITIVES.

It was not long before the boats bearing Tom and his companions had cleared the iceberg. The oarsmen rowed at their utmost speed, urged on by a promise of reward from our hero, and the impetus given by their powerful efforts soon sent both craft to a point whence an unobstructed view could be obtained of the island and the *Nighthawk*.

When they swept around the last projecting spur of ice, Tom—who was standing erect in the stern of the leading cutter—saw that their coming was just in the nick of time.

Violet and Mary Ann had evidently landed, as their boat could be seen tossing idle upon the waves near the beach. Within a few feet of it was another yawl crowded with men, and, just leaving the side of the bark, was still another similarly filled with a part of the bark's villainous crew.

Both were being rowed at a rapid pace toward the island—evidently in pursuit of the fugitives.

Tom uttered a quick exclamation of anger and fiercely bade the men increase their efforts.

“We have arrived at an opportune moment,” he added,

to Chester. "Those scoundrels will soon land, but they'll find an unexpected foe to contend with."

Gage chuckle in high glee.

"Just imagine the face old Flint will wear when he sees us," he replied. "He probably don't believe we are within a thousand miles of this place."

"I think we had better settle the matter offhand, now that we have met them," said Tom, thoughtfully. "We have sufficient force to capture them, and we might as well do it."

"In my opinion we will never be free from trouble until Nicholas Flint and his mates are behind prison bars. He is——"

"Ah! the men in the last boat have caught sight of us," interrupted Tom. "Now for war. Row, bullies! bend your backs! Fifty dollars to the first craft reaching the island!"

The stimulus of this reward caused the sailors to tug at the oars in frantic haste, and the two boats fairly leaped from wave to wave as a result.

Tom's quick eye had discovered a commotion in the yawl nearest the *Nighthawk*, and he knew from it that his little flotilla had been sighted at last.

Several men, among whom he recognized the familiar figure of Cyrus Holt, had risen to their feet and were

pointing to the newcomers with every evidence of excitement.

A moment later the bow of the yawl was turned back in the direction of the bark.

"They are going to board her again," exclaimed Chester, excitedly. "Can't we head them off?"

"Let them go," replied Tom. "Our first duty is to rescue Violet and Mary Ann. See! the other yawl has almost reached the beach."

It was as he said. The boat in advance was just in the act of touching the shore. In her Tom could discern Nicholas Flint, Captain Scroggins, and the ex-bully of Pickle Academy, Rufus Kane.

Suddenly it became apparent that these also had noticed the approaching craft from the hidden yacht.

Nicholas Flint was seen to spring to his feet and call the attention of his companions with frantic gesticulations to their new danger. In a moment all was confusion in the yawl.

The men abandoned their oars and sat staring at the two cutters in stupid amazement. Captain Scroggins acted as one bereft of his wits. He remained motionless in the stern sheets like a wooden image.

Not so Nicholas Flint. That wily man of many resources turned on the crew and instantly galvanized them into action by a torrent of invectives and commands so

loud and fierce that it was even heard in the distant cutters.

"He is trying to make them land," said Tom, catching a word or two.

"But they won't do it," suddenly replied Chester. "They want to return to the bark. Ah! they are fighting. They have shoved old Flint back from the oars and—— Great Scott! he is overboard!"

"The scoundrels! they would murder each other," exclaimed Tom, between his set teeth. "Pull, men! now is our time to capture them. Do your best, or they will escape us."

The struggle in the yawl was soon ended. By a rapid action Rufus Kane had rescued his endangered companion from the water, pulling him back into the boat just as the frightened sailors succeeded in turning the craft away from the island.

It was plainly evident they considered themselves more safe behind the sheltering walls of the bark, and from his actions Captain Scroggins agreed with them.

He was seen to expostulate with Nicholas Flint for a brief period, and then, seizing a gun from the bottom of the boat, he took rapid aim at the nearest cutter, and pulled the trigger.

The bullet flew harmlessly over Tom's head. Before the villainous skipper could fire again an answering shot

came from Captain Brett's boat, which was directly behind that of our hero.

It was better aimed, the leaden bullet striking the yawl just aft of the bow oarsman; but it passed through without doing any lasting damage.

"Shall we give 'em a volley, sir?" the old skipper called out at the same time.

"Yes, if they fire another shot," replied Tom. "If they don't, we had better save our ammunition until we attack the bark."

"How would it do for me to pull across and head 'em off?" asked the captain, suggestively. "We've got the rapid-fire gun, and it'll bring the scoundrels to terms in no time. Meanwhile, you can land and rescue them females."

"A good idea!" instantly responded our hero. "Go ahead, Captain Brett, and carry out your plan. Be cautious, and rely upon us for aid before a great while."

"Shall I remain here or go with him?" asked Chester, eagerly.

"You are anxious to see some fighting, I suppose," replied Tom, with a smile at his chum's meaning. "Stay with me, old boy; I may need you."

Captain Brett changed the course of his boat, and moved rapidly in a direction that would bring him between Nich-

olas Flint's yawl and the bark, while Tom continued toward the island.

"I suppose Violet and Mary Ann must have taken to the woods," said Gage.

"I don't blame them. They have had much to contend with, and it shows how desperate their situation must have been when they chose an uninhabited island as a refuge."

"I guess they didn't like the society of Rufus Kane and the rest."

Tom smiled grimly.

"If all goes well we'll enjoy his society ourselves," he replied.

"As far as Cape Town, anyway, eh?"

"Yes."

A moment later the cutter's prow touched the beach. Tom and Chester immediately leaped ashore, followed by several of the sailors.

Glancing toward the bark, our hero saw that Captain Brett was making strenuous efforts to cut off the yawl. The other craft, under charge of Cyrus Holt, had already reached the *Nighthawk*, and its late crew had disappeared on board.

"By George! I believe the skipper will be too late!" exclaimed Chester.

"I wonder why he don't use the gun?" asked Tom, impatiently.

“They are working at it. Something must be wrong. Ah! he is firing his smaller rifle. Good shot! He hit one of the scoundrels sure!”

A sharp report came to their ears from the other cutter, and a man in Flint's boat was seen to totter and fall across the gunwale. A second later several shots rang out from the after deck of the bark.

CHAPTER XVI.

TOM FINDS THE FUGITIVES.

"By cricky! that was a close shave!" exclaimed Chester, dancing about in excitement. "Those fellows on the bark just missed Brett's boat. I could see the bullets spatter in the water not two feet away."

"If he could only work the rapid-fire gun," replied Tom, in an agony of apprehension. "Some part of the mechanism must be out of order. What a confounded shame!"

From where they stood they could see the old skipper—nothing daunted by the volley just fired from the *Nighthawk's* deck—trying to load the repeating rifle mounted in the bow.

He gave it up in despair at last, however, and again fired at the retreating yawl with his smaller rifle.

By this time the race had narrowed down to a distance of thirty yards, with the *Nighthawk's* yawl slightly in the lead. It finally became evident to our hero that Brett would be defeated, so he accordingly fired his revolver in the air as a signal for him to retreat.

"It's no use," he said to his companion. "If he approaches any closer he is liable to be shot down. We can't do anything without the rapid-fire gun."

The old skipper obeyed the signal and, abandoning the chase, turned his cutter toward the island.

"We will wait for him before commencing the search for Violet and Mary Ann," decided Tom.

"By George! I believe they are making sail on the bark!" cried Gage, pointing to where a couple of sailors could be seen mounting the rigging.

Tom bit his lip with vexation. This latter move on the part of the enemy placed him in a dilemma. He did not care to see Nicholas Flint and his associates escape, neither did he desire to abandon his efforts to rescue Violet and her maid.

While he was deliberating with Chester, the cutter dashed up and Captain Brett sprang out.

"What on earth is the matter with the machine gun?" hastily asked Tom.

"Why, the blamed thing won't revolve," replied the old skipper, disconsolately. "If it had only worked we'd captured them scoundrels in a jiffy. I tried my best, but the chamber got stuck, and that settled it."

Tom stepped into the boat and hurriedly examined the rifle. His keen eyes soon discovered the cause of the trouble. A small bolt had worked loose, checking the movement of the cylinder.

The disability was speedily remedied, and then Tom rejoined his companions.

"I guess you'll find it all right now," he said, explaining the nature of the temporary defect. "The question now is, what shall we do?"

"You're not a-going to let 'em git away, air ye?" asked the old skipper. "We can capture them in three shakes of a free sheet with that gun. Just you say the word, and I'll guarantee to bring her around in no time."

The bark, which had been laying to, was now moving slowly from the island. The men aloft could be seen sheeting home the sails in desperate haste. It was evident that Flint, Scroggins and Company were anxious to leave the vicinity.

Tom glanced longingly toward the nearest fringe of palms, beyond which he knew Violet and Mary Ann were concealed. His keenest desire was to assure them of their present safety, but he was also loath to permit the escape of those on board of the *Nighthawk*.

Suddenly Chester offered a solution of the question by proposing that he and the captain take the cutters and pursue the bark, while Tom with a couple of men remained behind to find the fugitives.

"When we capture those scoundrels we'll return and pick you up," he added, eagerly.

"That's the idea!" spoke up Captain Brett, slapping his thigh. "And we want to set about it without further palaver, I'm thinking. What d'ye say?"

"Go ahead," replied Tom, heartily. "It's certainly the best scheme under the circumstances. Take all the men—you will possibly need them. I can look for Violet and Mary Ann without assistance. Make haste now before they get a better breeze."

Without further delay Chester and the old skipper embarked in their respective cutters and were soon under way.

Tom paused to watch them for a brief moment, then he walked hurriedly into the interior. He had resolved to strike a straight course across the island, which was but small, intending to call out at every few steps.

The first dozen yards were covered without difficulty, then our hero encountered a dense mass of undergrowth, which impeded his progress to such an extent that he was fain to skirt it.

This new direction led him parallel to the shore, and just within the first fringe of palms.

"Violet and Mary Ann must have followed this course," he murmured, "as they could never have penetrated directly into the interior."

Suddenly the distant roar of the machine gun came to his ears, sounding like the rapid beating of a Titan's drum.

"Ah! that looks like business," Tom exclaimed aloud. "I must see how they are getting on."

While speaking he had turned toward the beach, pres-

ently emerging from the woods, if the dense growth of palms could so be called.

Out in the open roadstead he saw the *Nighthawk* still under sail, but now standing toward the iceberg, which loomed white and glittering several miles distant.

Speeding after the bark were the two cutters, their oarsmen pulling away with hasty strokes. Tom made out the old skipper standing up near the repeating rifle, and, as he gazed, a heavy puff of smoke came from the weapon.

“Badly aimed,” muttered our hero, watching the water splash into foamy bubbles as the hail of bullets struck near the bark. “Brett ought to know that he can’t do anything while the boat is bobbing about. It is sheer waste of good ammunition.”

It was apparent that the *Explorer’s* skipper had arrived at the same opinion, as he suddenly ceased working at the rifle and devoted his energies to the tiller.

“I am afraid it promises to be a long chase,” thought Tom. “If the wind will only hold light, Chester and the skipper will have a chance. While they are in hot pursuit of the bark I’ll resume my search. Poor Violet has had enough trouble, and I want her and Mary Ann to know that friends are near.”

Only the echo of his own voice came back to him. The stillness and absence of life were peculiar. Not even a bird could be seen, and the waving tops of the lofty palm

trees bore no cunning faces peeping forth from among the leaves as might reasonably be expected.

“There might be a monkey hanging around,” mused Tom, with a short laugh. “I never saw such a place. It is deuced queer all the way through. An island like this, with tropical vegetation, hasn’t any business down in these latitudes, anyway.”

He paused and shouted both Violet’s name and that of the Irish maid, but without results. He then continued the march, withal a trifle uneasy in spirit.

The strange appearance of the island was still in his thoughts, and he again pondered on the matter while stumbling along.

“Now, if we had run across it in the Pacific Ocean or anywhere near the equator, it would be all right; but to find an island covered with tropical palms down here in the Antarctic Circle almost beats my time. True, the trees don’t look very green, and they are evidently pinched and frozen by the cold, but how did they happen to grow here at all, that’s what I want——”

Tom ceased speaking and suddenly halted. He had heard a distant rustling in the bushes on the right. What could it be? The noise had ceased almost instantly.

Tom felt for his revolver, and, holding the weapon in readiness for instant use, he asked, in a loud tone:

“Who is there? Speak, or I will fire!”

There was a brief silence, then the rustling commenced again, and presently Mary Ann's familiar face appeared from behind a palm tree.

On seeing Tom she gave a whoop of joy, and sprang to his side.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BARK REAPPEARS.

"Oh, blessed be th' day! It's Tom, dharling!" Mary Ann shouted, beside herself with joy. "Is it yerself or yer ghost? Spake, me b'y, spake, or Oi'll go crazy."

"It is I, Mary Ann, you can rest assured of that, and glad I am to see you. But where is Violet?"

Tom's voice betrayed his anxiety as he eagerly asked the latter question.

Before the Irish maid could reply, another rustling sounded in the brush and the girlish form of Violet Vaughn came into view.

She gave a glad cry on seeing our hero, and, rushing forward, clasped him by the hands so warmly that he blushed with pleasure.

"Tom, Tom, is it indeed you?" she exclaimed, in a voice choked with emotion. "I—I—can hardly believe—it seems like a dream."

"Wait till Oi give yez a pinch, Violet dear," broke in Mary Ann, her broad, good-humored face extended with a prodigious grin.

"It is not necessary," the young lady hastily replied, re-

leasing Tom's hand. "I see that I am not mistaken. Thank Heaven that he is here and will protect us!"

"That I will, Violet," answered our hero, gallantly. "Your troubles are now over, I hope. You have had a terrible siege of it."

He glanced at their torn and soiled garments, and observed, with a feeling of deep sympathy, the marks of suffering on Violet's face.

Mary Ann's broad shoulders could support the burden of even a greater misfortune, but the delicately reared girl with her had keenly felt the experience beyond a doubt.

After silently contemplating Tom for a moment, Mary Ann uttered another shout of joy, and, kicking the decayed tree branches and leaves from around her feet, began a rollicking jig.

"Whoop! Oi fale tin years younger, Tom, Oi do that," she cried. "Oi wuz niver so glad to see any wan since our pig shtrayed home after a wake's absence. Jine hands an' let us celebrate!"

Tom and Violet laughed heartily at the Irishwoman's exuberance of spirit.

"I don't know what I would have done if I had been alone on that dreadful ship," said Violet, tears filling her eyes. "Mary Ann behaved like a heroine, and protected me at the risk of her own life."

"She was able to hold her own even with that lawless mob, I'll warrant."

"They were actually afraid of her. Why, only the night before last she made them run away from the cabin and climb the rigging," and Violet smiled at the recollection.

By this time Mary Ann had grown tired of her dance and joined the others, asking:

"Tom, dharling, how did ye git here, Oi dunno? Where is the professor an' that broth of a b'y, Chester Gage?"

Our hero gave his interested audience a brief but lucid description of all that had transpired since the *Explorer* first sailed into Table Bay, not forgetting to enlarge on his feelings when he had heard of the catastrophe to the steamship *Ganges River*.

"It has been a long chase, but the hand of Providence has been with us," he added, with emotion, "and I have found you at last. Now, I think you owe me an explanation of events."

"That we do, me b'y, an' sure we'll tell yez," replied Mary Ann. "At last Violet will, an' Oi'll prompt her moind in places. Go an, dear, an' tell yer swateheart phat a toime we've had wid thim divils beyant."

Violet related the circumstances of the fire and their subsequent rescue by the crew of the *Nighthawk*, and also described the events that had taken place down to the pur-

chasing of stores outside of Cape Town, all of which is known to the reader.

Then Mary Ann broke in with an account of their later experiences, which she related with many outbursts of temper and anathemas on Nicholas Flint and his cohorts.

"Do yez know, Tom," she said, "afther that spalpane of a captain—may his bones be made into drumsticks—got th' grub from th' other captain, Oi thought th' jig wuz up, so to spake. There we wuz, two lone females aboard th' bark wid a passel av rogues, an' the vessel hiddin' south away from our friends and civilization."

"It was certainly trying on you," acknowledged Tom.

"It wuz that, but as it turrened out it wuz also tryin' to some av thim felleys aboard the *Nighthawk*," and Mary Ann gave a reminiscent chuckle.

"Well, we sailed an' sailed an' sailed till at last we struck this bit av an island. We were in th' cabin all th' toime, an' had lashings of grub an' wather, but the deuce av a bit o' th' crater, more's the pity. Thim people let us alone becace they had to. Oi made thim."

Tom did not doubt her in the least.

"Th' first two or three days out that ould villain, Nicholas Flint, an' th' divil's own b'y, Rufus Kane, kim nosing around, but afther a short talk wid thim they concluded to stay away."

"And Cyrus Holt—did he bother you?"

"Wanst—he! he! he! Oi slapped him to slape wid wan blow av me fist, an' he let us alone afther that. Well, we bided our toime, till we finally arrived here. I kept a close watch t'roo th' windies, an' whin Oi saw th' island only a short distance away Oi said to Violet, sez Oi, 'Violet, dear, we'll fly th' coop an' lave the bark at once.' "

"It was a great risk going ashore in a place where you might have found wild beasts," remarked Tom, shaking his head.

"We had to take chances, me b'y. Oi wasn't certain we would foind wild bastes on th' island, an' Oi knew we had 'em aboard th' bark. That's th' way Oi figgered it, an' we made up our moinds to skip. At last this very marnin' Oi saw an opportunity whoile th' min were at breakfast, an' Oi secured a boat. We embarked an' got almost ashore before they discovered our absence. They folleyed us, but Oi whacked some av thim over th' hids an' we escaped, an' here we are, Tom, dharlin'. Violet!"

"Yes."

"May Oi hug yer young man just wanst fur luck?"

"I think we had better return to the beach," hastily remarked our hero, changing the subject. "The cutters should have made the capture by this time."

"Are you sure they will succeed?" asked Violet, anxiously.

"Not sure; but I think Chester and Captain Brett can

speak for themselves, especially as they have a very powerful gun. Come; we will go down to the shore."

Tom led the way through the fringe of palms back to where he had landed from the cutters. On reaching the beach he saw to his surprise that the offing was entirely clear, not a sign of either the *Nighthawk* or the cutters being visible.

"By George! that is mighty queer," he muttered, anxiously scanning the horizon.

Then a second later his eyes fell upon the iceberg, and his face cleared.

"Ah! they must have gone behind it," he said to Violet and Mary Ann. "I remember that the bark was heading in that direction when I went in search of you."

"I hope the bark won't escape from them and return here," said Violet, apprehensively.

Tom glanced up at the sky. It had grown slightly overcast, and a banking of somber clouds to the northward proclaimed, even to his inexperienced mind, that heavy weather might be safely anticipated.

The wind had also increased and was now blowing strong enough to send the bark along at a five-knot speed, at least.

All this was very alarming to our hero, but he concealed the fact from his companions. Only Mary Ann observed his perturbation, and she asked, shrewdly:

"It don't be lookin' very pleasant, do it, me b'y?"

"Oh, it's nothing," replied Tom, with an assumption of carelessness. "The weather is a little murky, but I guess it'll blow over. I wish they would hurry back and take us to the yacht. We have a job before us, freeing her from the iceberg, and I want to be at it before bad weather does come."

"It wouldn't be very comfortable to spend a night on this island," said Violet, with a shiver. "If we couldn't light a fire we would certainly suffer severely from the cold."

"It do be a good job we have got warm clothing on us now," added Mary Ann. "That heavy cloak ye see on her an' this wan Oi snatched up before we left th' steamer, an' glad Oi am of that same prisence of moind."

The day, which had taken on a feeling of warmth from the sun, now seemed cold and blustering, and Tom felt more and more anxious at the non-appearance of the cutters.

"I wish now I had let the bark go," he muttered to himself. "If anything should happen to the cutters we would be in a deuce of a fix. I wonder if that sailor is up on the peak of the berg yet."

He had reference to the man sent up before they left the yacht, and who had signaled the deck concerning the escape of Violet and Mary Ann from the *Nighthawk*.

Taking his cap, Tom waved it back and forth over his head, meanwhile closely watching the summit of the iceberg.

"Phat do ye be doin'?" asked Mary Ann, curiously.

"I want to see if there is a man up there from the *Explorer*. If I can attract his attention, they may send the yawl from the yacht."

"How are you going to ask him?" queried Violet.

"We will have to trust to his intelligence."

"If th' professor could only look t'roo that lump of ice he'd soon sind a boat, Oi'm t'inkin'. He's a smart bit av a man, even——"

"There is a man up there. See! he is answering my signal!" excitedly interrupted Tom. "Oh, I'd give anything if I only knew the naval system of signaling."

Just visible on the extreme tip of the distant berg was a black spot wavering back and forth. It was undoubtedly the sailor sent up there by Tom. He had evidently remained on the lookout for the purpose of keeping Professor Pickle informed of the cutters' progress.

His actions indicated that he had seen Tom and the others, but whether those on board the *Explorer* would think of dispatching another boat for them was doubtful.

Tom realized that the professor was the last person—wrapped up in his scientific studies—to expect anything

from, and for the sailors, they would hardly do much without authority.

"Well, they know that we are here, anyway," finally remarked Tom, philosophically. "If the professor don't send a boat we won't have long to wait for the cutters."

"I do belave it is snowing," suddenly cried Mary Ann, holding our her broad hands.

Our hero quickly glanced up and saw that she was right. A number of tiny flakes were drifting down, and as they watched, it became apparent that a regular storm was impending.

The sky was now completely overcast. Dull leaden clouds at last obscured the sun, and the wind blowing fitfully, brought a sense of coldness to the little group.

"Violet, you and Mary Ann get under cover of the trees," directed Tom. "I will remain here and watch for the boats."

"Not a bit av it," promptly objected the Irishwoman. "If ye can stand th' weather so can Oi. Anyway thim trees—they do be reminding me av dust-brushes—are no good."

"I will stay here, too, Tom," said Violet. "If it grows much worse we'll all look for shelter, but as it is now we——"

"Mither av Moses!" suddenly shouted Mary Ann, giving a spring in the air.

"What is the matter?" hastily asked Tom.

"Look—look beyant that lump av ice on the other edge of the berg. Isn't it a ship a-poking its nose around the——"

"Great grief!" ejaculated Tom, with a sinking heart.

"It is the *Nighthawk*, and she is alone!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

TOM OVERHEARS A CONVERSATION.

The sudden appearance of the bark around the other edge of the berg, and evidently alone, came as a blow to Tom.

He could not understand what had become of the cutters. It was hardly possible they had been either captured or lost in an attack. Tom placed too much reliance in the skill and bravery of Chester and Captain Brett to anticipate that.

The fact still remained that the *Nighthawk* with her scoundrelly crew was again approaching the island, and it meant the greatest peril to our hero and his companions.

He again bemoaned the lack of judgment that had allowed him to send the boats away on the chase. Still, there was neither use nor time to cry over spilt milk.

“We must find a hiding place somewhere on the island, and that speedily,” he cried. “If the bark makes land again, we run great risk of capture.”

Violet paled perceptibly, but she made no reply. Mary Ann also seemed disturbed, and she muttered imprecations against the oncoming vessel under her breath.

The situation certainly seemed serious, and our hero

cannot be blamed for feeling very anxious. For himself he did not care an iota, but it was the fact that his companions were in danger of falling into the power of Nicholas Flint and his rascally gang once more, that worried him.

He resolved to prevent such a catastrophe with his life if necessary. The bitter hatred and enmity borne against him by his former guardian and the two accomplices made him believe that nothing would be too villainous for them to do if their revenge could be secured.

"If Chester and the skipper would only come," he groaned aloud.

"Niver moind, Tom," replied Mary Ann, encouragingly. "Oi t'ink we can foind a place to hide till they do arrive."

"Our being placed in this position is due to my confounded idiocy," continued Tom, bitterly. "I should have kept the cutters here until you were found."

"Oi t'ink ye did jusht right," stoutly replied the Irish maid. "It wuz yer juty to capture thim scamps, an' their escaping now is no fault av yours."

"Well, be that as it may, we must get under cover at once. It won't take long for the bark to run down here. Come on, we will try to find a hiding place somewhere in the interior."

Taking a last look at the approaching bark, Tom saw

with deep anxiety that she was coming down with a free sheet, and would soon arrive within landing distance.

With a feeling almost akin to despair, he led the way through the fringe of palms straight toward the center of the island. This time he fortunately struck an opening in the underbrush, and succeeded in penetrating some distance before being compelled to stop.

Seeing a small clearing almost completely surrounded by trees and matted vines, he conducted his companions into the center, and then arranged the undergrowth behind them in such a manner as to conceal their passage.

"This do look like a bower," remarked Mary Ann, eying the surroundings approvingly. "If it wuz only a trifle graner Oi'd t'ink Oi wuz in Oirland sure."

"I wish it was Ireland for the time being," remarked Violet, with a smile.

"So do I," added Tom, fervently. "Now, what I propose to do is to leave you here while I go on a scout."

"You are going to leave us?" cried Violet, in alarm.

"Only for a while. It is necessary that I should keep watch for the cutters. If they return, I must meet them on the beach."

Handing his revolver to Mary Ann, he added:

"Take this and use it if those villains should stumble upon your hiding place. It is loaded and ready for instant use."

"An' phat will ye do? Have yez another?"

"Oh, I'll get along," Tom replied evasively.

The snow was still falling, but the density of the branches overhead prevented the flakes from reaching the little glade. It was quite cold, however, and Tom saw that Violet felt it severely.

Before leaving he removed his outer fur coat and compelled her to don it, despite her protestations.

"No, you will need the coat more than I," he insisted. "While you are compelled to remain here in one place, I will be moving around. Now keep as still as you can and wait patiently for my return.

"If anything should happen, just fire a couple of shots in the air," he added, to Mary Ann. "When I come back, I'll whistle three times as a signal."

"So Oi won't shoot yez, eh?"

"Yes."

After a few further words of caution, Tom slipped from the clearing and started toward the beach at a swift run, taking care to keep within the shelter of the trees as much as possible.

The prolonged absence of the cutters made him fear that some disaster had occurred, and his anxiety was not dispelled when he saw, on reaching the shore, that the offing was still clear.

Not a sign of the boats was visible.

"By George! I wonder what could have happened?" murmured Tom, glancing wistfully toward the distant iceberg. "I hope no harm has come to Chester and the rest. It is very strange, though, what keeps them."

The bark was still coming down before the wind, and had almost reached the island. Withdrawing to a place of concealment behind a clump of trees, Tom watched the *Nighthawk* until she finally rounded to, close to the beach.

He saw to his surprise that the anchor was not dropped.

"Guess they don't intend to remain long," he murmured, hopefully. "The skipper is probably afraid of a gale. The weather certainly looks stormy."

After a short delay, a boat was lowered from the quarter and boarded by six or seven men, among whom Tom made out Nicholas Flint and Rufus Kane. As far as he could see, Cyrus Holt was not of the party.

Retreating farther inland, Tom watched the craft near the shore; then he circled around until he found a bush close to the landing place. Ensconcing himself therein, he waited patiently for the little party to approach.

Presently Nicholas Flint and young Kane sprang out, followed by a couple of sailors.

Tom's former guardian and the ex-bully appeared to be in the best of spirits. They were laughing and joking with evident pleasure, and seemed highly pleased at some recent occurrence.

"Nothing better could have happened for us, eh?" said Nicholas Flint, with a sly chuckle.

"You are right, chief," replied Rufus Kane. "I confess that I was getting frightened when that lump of ice fell and helped us out. That confounded gun the first cutter carried would have certainly proven too much for us."

"It was the fiend's own weapon. We wouldn't have lasted ten minutes if they had drawn near enough to use it."

"Do you think the yacht was entirely destroyed?"

Tom pricked up his ears and listened intently.

"I reckon so. The mass of ice struck the forecastle and almost buried it from sight," replied Nicholas Flint. "I don't think the craft will ever float again."

"Did you see the old professor anywhere?"

"Yes; it was he that signaled the cutters."

"And Tom?"

"That is what puzzles me," answered Flint, thoughtfully. "He wasn't in the boats nor on the yacht."

"Then he must be on this island," promptly replied Rufus.

"Good! I hope so. We can round him up at the same time as we do the girl and that old spitfire."

"You mean Mary Ann?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll leave you the job of catching her," replied

Kane, with a short laugh. "I want none of it. My face aches yet from the slap she gave me."

"I'll put a bullet through her if she fools with me," said Nicholas Flint, brutally.

"Do you think that Cyrus is badly hurt?" asked Rufus, after a pause.

The hidden listener in the bush could hardly restrain an exclamation of joy.

"So one of the scoundrels has been wounded, eh?" he muttered.

"It's hard to say," slowly replied Nicholas Flint. "The shot struck him in the thigh, and made a pretty severe wound, but he may get over it all right. To tell you the truth, I don't care whether he does or not. If he croaks there will be one less to divide the treasure with."

"When we find it," remarked Kane, significantly.

"Oh, I guess Captain Scroggins knows where it is. He wouldn't have taken all this trouble, and gone to the expense of fitting out this expedition, if he wasn't sure."

"Do you think this is the real island?"

"So the skipper says. He is puzzled to find it so close to the African coast, though. He declares he sailed as far south as the fiftieth parallel before running across it on his first cruise. We can talk over this on board. What we must do now is to capture that boy and his companions, and get them on board the bark before the cutters

make their appearance. You take one of the sailors and go to the left, while I take the right. If you sight them, fire your revolver twice."

The speakers moved off to give some instructions to the crew of the yawl, leaving Tom greatly delighted at the intelligence he had just gained.

The non-appearance of the *Explorer's* boats was now explained. They had given up the chase for the purpose of rescuing Professor Pickle and the remainder of the crew from danger caused by a fall of ice on the yacht.

"From what Flint says, they are liable to make their appearance at any moment," muttered Tom, joyfully. "I hope they hurry. When they come we'll see if we can't turn the tables on Mr. Nicholas Flint and his friends."

A few moments later the party from the bark divided and set out in search of the fugitives. After waiting for a brief period, Tom left his hiding place and darted into the interior.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FIGHT IN THE GLADE.

After traveling a short distance Tom made the disagreeable discovery that he was proceeding in the wrong direction. Certain landmarks noticed by him on the previous trip to the little glade were not now visible.

"By Jove! I am sure I left the beach at the proper place," he muttered, gazing at the adjacent trees in perplexity.

A brief scrutiny of the surroundings convinced Tom that he really had made a mistake, so he reluctantly started to retrace his steps.

"Too big a hurry to join Violet and Mary Ann, I suppose. Well, the more haste the less speed applies in my case as well as in others. Next time I'll be more careful."

While hastening back, Tom pondered over the information he had just gained from Flint and young Kane. The mention of a treasure to be found on the island came as a surprise, and he now realized that Nicholas Flint's presence in Southern seas was not altogether caused by a desire for revenge.

True, there had been some talk of gold—or "stuff," as Captain Scroggins had termed it—in the cabin of the

Nighthawk when our hero and the professor overheard the conversation between the conspirators, but the allusion had been so vague that Tom paid little attention to it.

"If that is all they are after, I wish they would find it and go," our hero murmured, ruefully. "As the case stands now, they have the whip-hand of me, and probably will until Chester comes to our aid."

Again reaching the vicinity of the shore, Tom proceeded with greater caution, and presently emerged near the bush in which he had been concealed while listening to the conversation between Flint and Kane.

The yawl-boat was still drawn up on the beach, and the two men left in charge were crouched in the stern trying to shield themselves from the snow with the aid of a tarpaulin.

Slipping behind the bush, Tom took his bearings anew. A hasty glance toward the iceberg only resulted in disappointment. The cutters were still invisible.

Tom's anxiety to join Violet and Mary Ann in the little glade was so great that he wasted but few moments at the beach. Satisfying himself by a close scrutiny that he was not again mistaken, he plunged once more into the forest of palms.

The distance to the clearing was barely a mile, and, as the greater part of the way consisted of spaces comparatively free from undergrowth, it was not long before Tom

found himself approaching the place in which he had left Violet and her maid.

Forgetting to give the whistle agreed upon as a signal, he forced his way through the outer circle of brush, and was just in the act of calling out, when he saw the figure of a youth standing in the center of the glade.

It was Rufus Kane!

The overwhelming surprise of the discovery caused Tom to give a gasp of astonishment, and at the sound, Rufus wheeled swiftly and confronted him.

"Tom Truxton!" exclaimed young Kane, his face paling perceptibly.

Stepping forward, he started to draw a revolver from his belt, but before he could extricate the weapon our hero darted forward and clutched him by the throat.

Rufus attempted to shout, but the sinewy hand at his neck stifled the words, and he was compelled to defend himself unaided.

Throwing his arms around Tom's waist, he bent forward in an effort to force that lad to the ground, but the maneuver failed ignominiously.

"No, you don't, you miserable scoundrel!" grated Tom, resisting the attempt with all the power of his sturdy frame.

"Let go my throat, will you?" Rufus managed to gasp. "You—you are choking m-me to d-death."

"Throw your revolver to the ground," directed Tom, clinging to Kane's neck with the tenacity of a bulldog.

The youth pretended to obey, but when our hero released his grasp, the treacherous scoundrel suddenly turned and struck him full in the face with his clinched fist.

The blow was so unexpected and withal forceful that Tom reeled backward, only saving himself from falling by a great effort.

Kane was not slow in following up the advantage thus gained.

Rapidly jerking the pistol from his belt, he leveled it at Tom and shouted in a triumphant voice:

"Surrender, confound you! Throw up your hands or I'll put a bullet through you!"

The case looked desperate, and our hero was on the point of obeying when he thought of an old scheme.

"Grab him, Mary Ann!" he cried, glancing behind Rufus Kane.

The latter hastily turned at the sound of the name he had reason to dread, and at that instant Tom was again upon him.

The trick was a success, but the battle was not yet won. Rufus struggled desperately in our hero's grasp, and, wild with rage and fear, threshed out blindly with both hands.

Notwithstanding the rain of blows, Tom grappled with

his antagonist, and finally succeeded in forcing him against an adjacent tree.

Seeing that he was getting the worst of the combat, Rufus shouted lustily for help, evidently hoping to attract the attention of his allies.

"This will never do," thought our hero, trying to shift his grasp upon the young scoundrel, to his throat again. "If Flint or the sailors hear him it will be all up with me sure."

By a skillful movement of his right hand he at last managed to accomplish his object, and Kane's whining notes died away.

At that moment, however, Tom heard some one forcing their way through the underbrush, on the opposite side of the little clearing, and a second later the villainous head of Nicholas Flint appeared from behind a tree.

He uttered a cry of surprise and exultation on seeing Tom, then sprang into the little clearing.

"Hold on, Rufus," he cried; "don't let him escape."

But as it happened, it was Tom who was doing the holding, Rufus being too busy gasping for breath to pay attention to other details. Seeing that only the most rapid action would save him, Tom threw his antagonist to the ground with a final effort, and then fled into the brush, closely pursued by Nicholas Flint.

"Stop, confound you!" shouted the latter. "Stop or I'll fire!"

The threat only increased Tom's fleeing steps. He was fully resolved to risk a bullet rather than surrender. He knew what his capture by his implacable enemies would mean, and he made up his mind to take any chances.

Darting from tree to tree, he managed to keep out of the threatening weapon's range, but the sounds behind him proved that Flint was in hot pursuit. Again that individual shouted a command to stop, this time emphasizing it by a random shot.

The bullet flew wide of the mark, however, and Tom sped on uninjured.

In leaving the little glade so unceremoniously he had not selected his avenue of departure, and the consequence was that he now found himself plunging along in an entirely unknown direction.

Presently, hearing the sounds of pursuit growing faint, he drew up and looked about him. The palms were more scattered than was the case nearer the glade, and the surface of the earth seemed slightly uneven, rising in places to the dignity of a respectable hill.

Hastily mounting one of the larger eminences he glanced ahead and caught a faint glimpse of the sea, rolling in sullen breakers upon a stretch of beach apparently not a quarter of a mile distant.

Just as he made the discovery Tom heard a shout behind him. Turning quickly he saw, to his profound chagrin and alarm, two sailors running toward him at a rapid pace.

One bore a rifle which he leveled at Tom with a harsh command to throw up his arms. The threatening attitude of the man, and the hopelessness of escaping, compelled obedience, and a moment later he was a helpless prisoner in the hands of two members of the *Nighthawk's* crew!

CHAPTER XX.

MARY ANN TO THE RESCUE.

When Tom left the little glade on his unfortunate trip to the beach, Violet and Mary Ann attempted to make themselves comfortable while awaiting his return.

It was much warmer in the interior of the island than on the shore, the trees and matted undergrowth affording a shelter against the wintry blasts.

Selecting a spot in one corner of the clearing, Mary Ann piled up a quantity of branches and decayed vines in such a manner that it formed quite a snug retreat.

"Now, Violet, dear," she said cheerfully. "Jusht crape insoid yer new residence and rist at aise till Tom comes back."

"I hope he won't get into any trouble or run across any of those dreadful men from the bark," replied the young lady, settling herself comfortably upon a heap of dried leaves.

"Och! let that b'y alone for level-headedness, dear. It's himself as'll tache thim a thrick or two. Do go to slape fur a wee bit, Violet. Yez nade it, an' Oi can watch the while."

Violet protested that she was not a bit sleepy, but the

grateful warmth of Tom's fur-lined overcoat and a certain feeling of security at last caused her eyes to close, and she dozed off.

Mary Ann sat silent and alert, keeping her watchful eyes roving from side to side of the glade, in constant search for aught suspicious.

Fifteen minutes passed by before anything occurred to alarm the vigilant sentinel.

Just then as Mary Ann was growing impatient at Tom's long absence, she heard a peculiar sound behind a clump of bushes several yards away. Again the noise came to her ears, and this time she recognized its meaning.

It was a sneeze, and some one was approaching the little glade.

Quick as a flash the Irishwoman bent over her companion and awakened her with a touch. Then, passing one hand lightly across Violet's mouth, Mary Ann whispered, warningly:

"Sh-h! Don't brathe a worrud. Some wan do be comin' this way."

Violet gave a gasp of terror and then hurriedly arose to her feet, followed by Mary Ann. The latter suddenly thought of the revolver given her by Tom, and found to her dismay that she had laid it down somewhere while arranging the nook for Violet and herself.

She hastily glanced around, but failed to see it.

The sounds of some person forcing his way through the tangled vines and matted undergrowth came to her ears, and the erstwhile brave woman was seized with a panic.

Grasping Violet's hand she crept softly from the clearing into the brush, and then fled blindly from the spot.

For fully ten minutes they scrambled over scattered heaps of decayed vegetation, past groups of palms and through almost impassable clumps of bushes until at last Violet could go no farther from sheer exhaustion.

"We will have to stop, Mary Ann," she gasped. "I—I can't run any more."

By this time the Irish maid's unreasonable terror had spent itself, and she halted, an evidently much disgusted woman.

"Sure an' phat a fule Oi am," she exclaimed, with a snort of contempt. "Phy did Oi run till Oi saw phat wuz the danger, Oi dunno? It might have been Tom all th' toime."

"No, I am certain it was somebody else," replied Violet, glancing fearfully from side to side. "Tom would have given the signal agreed upon."

"That may be. Anyway, we're here now, an' where we are Oi dunno. Is that th' blessed ocean Oi see troo thim trees?"

While speaking she pointed to where a shimmer of

water could be discerned in the distance. Violet replied in the affirmative.

“Thin we’ll walk slowly along skirting th’ shore till something turns up. It’s mesilf as’d burn tin candles ivery day fur a wake if we were safe aboard Tom’s yacht. Oi do be gettin’ weary av this game av hoide an’ sake.”

How fervently Violet agreed with her is left to the reader’s imagination. Brought up as she had been under the tender care of a mother, and used to the comforts of a pleasant home, it is no wonder that Violet Vaughn suffered from the discomforts and exposure of her present situation.

Only the devoted watchfulness of the faithful maid, Mary Ann, kept her from succumbing to the terrible strain.

After a short rest the fugitives walked toward the sea, keeping a careful watch for signs of pursuit? Suddenly, as they were skirting the base of a small hill, Mary Ann’s keen eyes caught sight of a familiar figure running in their direction.

She barely had time to recognize the newcomer as Tom, when that youth sprinted out of sight behind another eminence.

His appearance and subsequent disappearance was so sudden that Mary Ann could hardly believe her sight. Rubbing her eyes confusedly, she gasped:

"Wuz it his ghost, Oi dunno? Did yez see any wan, Violet!"

"See who? What do you mean?" asked her companion in alarm.

"Phy, Tom Truxton either passed us jusht thin or Oi'm seeing spirits."

"Tom? Where—which way did he go?"

"Over there beyant that hillock. Oi wuz lookin' in that direction when some wan wid the face an' the clothes av yer swateheart skipped by loike a shadder."

"It might have been he," hurriedly replied Violet. "Let us follow and see."

But Mary Ann hung back. Her superstitious nature had been aroused by the peculiar disappearance, as it seemed to her, and she was exceedingly reluctant to approach the spot.

"Oi am afeered," she muttered. "Oi am not scared at a man, or tin av thim fur that matter, but whin ghosts do walk widin plain soight av me Oi want none av thim."

"Nonsense, Mary Ann," exclaimed Violet, catching her by the arm. "There are no such things as ghosts or spirits, and——"

"Phat! No such t'ings as ghosts!" almost shouted the Irish maid, incredulously. "Phy, Oi seed two av thim wid me own oies a year ago come Michaelmas. No such t'ings as ghosts, fursooth!"

"Well, anyway, there are none on this island," persisted Violet. "Come——"

"Sh-h!" suddenly interrupted her companion, grasping her violently by the shoulder and forcing her behind a bush. "Sh-h! not a worrud if ye vally yer loife. There be two men a-comin' out av thim woods over there."

Violet looked in the direction indicated, and saw a couple of rough-appearing sailors creep from the brush as if following some one.

The man in advance carried a gun, which he handled as if preparing to use it at any moment. While Violet and Mary Ann were gazing in terror, Tom Truxton came into view on the summit of a little hill not fifty yards away.

Both watchers tried to shout a warning, but their voices were lost in a stentorian command given by the sailors.

A few moments later Violet and her companion saw Tom made a prisoner as recorded in the preceding chapter. While the seamen were binding their captive, Mary Ann hastily snatched a thick stick of wood from the ground, and advanced toward them with the stealthy tread of a cat.

Approaching within a few feet of the group unseen, she lifted her weapon and rushed forward with an angry cry of defiance!

CHAPTER XXI.

EXPLANATIONS—THE PRISONERS.

When Tom found himself a prisoner in the hands of the two sailors he almost gave up in despair. The strange disappearance of Violet and Mary Ann and the discovery of Rufus Kane in the little clearing had filled him with apprehension, but now to also become a captive of the enemy was too much.

"I suppose your master will be greatly pleased at your success?" he said, bitterly, to one of the sailors who was tying a belt around his legs.

"I kinder reckon so," replied the fellow, with a satisfied grin. "We'll git a handsome reward for this day's work, eh, Bill?"

The sailor addressed nodded his head and coolly proceeded with his task of securing Tom's arms.

"I can make it worth your while if you will leave the bark and join us," continued Tom, feeling his way. "I will give each of you more money than you have ever seen before."

"Where'll you git it? Your yacht is gone up, and I reckon about the only way you can return to the States is

in the *Nighthawk*. No, that kind er talk won't wash. What you have got on yer we'll take, anyway, and——"

"Whoop!"

Like a peal of thunder from a clear sky came the interruption, and before the dumfounded seamen could even turn around, one of them received such a terrific whack from Mary Ann's club that he tumbled to the ground in a heap.

"Yez will captoor that b'y, eh?" yelled the Amazon, aiming a blow at the other. "Ooh! let me at ye, ye spal-pane an' thafe av th' worruld! Take that, an' that, an' that!"

Each word was accented by a shrewd blow, and, after trying in vain to grasp his gun, the fellow turned and fled down the side of the hill. He was not destined to escape, however.

The little scrimmage had only given Mary Ann a taste for more, and she bounded after the fleeing man with leaps that would have put a kangaroo to shame.

"Stop, or Oi'll brain yez! Kim back now, an' surrender yezself. Oi won't be tellin' yez no more. Take that, will yez!"

Catching up with the sailor, she gave him one rap across the shoulder, and to such good effect that he sprawled headlong upon the ground.

Flushed with victory, Mary Ann quickly bound him

with his own belt, and then, turning her attention to the other seaman, placed him in the same situation. She then released Tom from his lashings, and after all danger was past burst into tears, woman-like.

Tom's joy at thus finding himself unexpectedly released was great. He shook hands with Violet until that young lady winced with pain, and then he danced around Mary Ann in a manner befitting a wild Indian.

"Great grief! but I was never so tickled in all my life!" he shouted, totally regardless of the dangers still lurking on the island. "Mary Ann, you are a jewel. How did you happen to leave the glade? How did you get here? Were you not afraid to tackle these men?"

And a score of other questions did he ask, until the Irishwoman beamed through her tears and joined in his enthusiasm.

"An' faith it wuz lucky fur ye, me b'y, that Violet and Oi happened to be strolling this way fur our health. As fur th' little racket Oi do be havin' jusht now, it wuz nothin' at all, at all. Oi remimber th' toime whin me an' me cousin, Patrick Googan—rist his soul—wint till a shindy at——"

Anticipating a long-winded description of some Hibernian fracas in the remote past, Tom interrupted her by proposed that they leave such an exposed position for the time being.

“Nicholas Flint and young Kane are still on the island, and they are liable to discover us at any moment,” he added. “Not that I care now, being that we can arm ourselves with the weapons belonging to these sailors, but it is just as well to find a place where they can’t surprise us.”

“Phat will yez do with thim rogues, Oi dunno?” asked Mary Ann, indicating the two prisoners with a contemptuous jerk of her thumb.

“Take them with us; they may prove useful,” briefly replied Tom.

Both seamen had recovered from the effects of Mary Ann’s blows, and they lay stretched out upon their backs gazing at her with ludicrous expressions of awe and bewilderment.

That an ordinary woman could prove to be such a cyclone was beyond their comprehension. They did not know Mary Ann.

Relieving them of their revolvers and the repeating rifle, Tom loosened their foot-lashings and sternly bade them stand erect.

“Now, if you do as I tell you and make no attempt at escape, we won’t harm you,” he said, adding with a grim smile: “If you try any funny business, I’ll turn you over to the tender mercies of Mary Ann here.”

“An’ Oi’ll soon tache thim a lesson they’ll niver forgit till their dying day,” promptly chimed in the Irishwoman.

Selecting a secure hiding place between several bushes, Tom transferred his little party, and then asked Violet and Mary Ann to explain their departure from the glade.

This was done in a few choice and characteristic sentences by the latter, who seemed to be very much ashamed while telling of her hasty flight on hearing the noise in the brush.

"It has turned out all right, anyway," replied Tom, when she had finished. "We are again united, and in addition hold two of the enemy's force as our prisoners."

Tom then told his companions of his experiences with Kane and Nicholas Flint, also the conversation he had overheard while hidden in the bush near the landing.

"So th' pore yacht is smashed, eh?" sorrowfully asked Mary Ann.

"I am afraid so," replied Tom in the same tone. "Chester would never have given up the chase after the bark if something serious had not occurred. We will learn all the details when the cutters return."

"They may be nearing the island now," remarked Violet.

"That is true. It is certainly possible they are on their way here at this very moment. It won't do to stay at this end of the island—they would never find us."

"If yez could only clim wan av thim dust-brushes," sug-

gested Mary Ann, indicating a group of lofty palms, "ye could git a glimpse av th' coast an' p'raps th' iceberg."

"It would take a long-tailed monkey to shin up one of those trees," answered Tom, shaking his head. "No; we'll have to skirt the shore, or else trudge back through the center of the island."

"Let it be th' shore be all manes. Oi'm sick an' tired of trampin' over thim hapes of leaves an' underbrush."

"Well, before we go I want to have an understanding with these gentlemen here," said Tom, meaning the prisoners. "Mary Ann, you and Violet please keep watch while I talk to them for a moment. Pay particular attention to that clearing beyond those two trees, as I think Flint and Kane will approach from that direction, if they come at all."

"Shall Oi shoot if Oi espy thim?" asked the Irish-woman, gingerly handling a pistol Tom had given her, which he had taken from one of the captured sailors.

"How would you aim?" queried our hero, winking at Violet.

Mary Ann planted her feet firmly upon the ground, closed her eyes, and then pointed the weapon in a very vague and wavering manner toward a nearby hill.

"I think it would be just as well for you to notify me

instead of shooting," dryly remarked Tom, turning his attention to the prisoners.

"Now, see here, my men," he began, sternly. "You are in my power and there is no possible chance of your escaping. It is well for you to understand that once for all. When I was your prisoner I told you that I would make it worth your while to side with me in this affair. I now repeat the offer. My party is not so badly off as you suppose. True, our vessel is wrecked, but probably not so seriously as we think. My companions in the cutters are well armed, as your mates had reason to know to-day, and they are liable to be here at any moment. If you will join us, I'll see that you are each paid liberally when we return to civilization. What do you say?"

"What does yer want us to do?" sullenly asked one of the sailors.

"Nothing, at present, except to answer a few questions; but later, if it comes to a fight with the crew of the *Nighthawk*, I want you to help us."

"Will yer also give us a share in the treasure?" questioned the other, greedily.

"What treasure?" asked Tom, suspiciously.

"Why, de gold and stuff the skipper of the bark seed on this island when he sailed down here before."

"I don't know of any such treasure, but if we find it

you will certainly have your share with the rest, and the money I promised you as well."

"Then I agree to serve under youse, and so will Bill here. I'm tired of that old bark and that thin chap's bossing about, anyway. He's no good. Now, what do you want me to tell yer?"

CHAPTER XXII.

A SHOT FROM THE BUSH.

Tom could hardly conceal his satisfaction at thus having won over two of the enemy's force to his side. They were not very pleasant companions, but their presence would tell in a battle with Nicholas Flint and his mates, and furthermore the acquisition would lessen the strength of the opposing party by just two men.

Tom fully believed from the tone in which the prisoners had replied that they were sincere, but he did not intend to take any unnecessary chances by releasing them before being rejoined by Chester and the rest.

"I want you to tell me all you know about the plans of the thin man, as you call him, and Captain Scroggins," he said, "and also how many men have been wounded."

"I'll answer yer last question fust," replied the sailor. "Both Cyrus Holt and the skipper was wounded to-day by the bullets from that blamed pepper box one of them cutters carried. The captain only got his arm hurted, but the other chap was hit purty bad. He's in the cabin now, laid out and groaning ter beat the deuce."

"Captain Scroggins was injured also?"

"Yes. He's able to be around, but he didn't come

ashore to-day. Now fur yer other question about their plans. All I know is, that the old skipper and the thin man, together with Holt and a blamed kid named Kane, came down here to find a treasure Captain Scroggins said wuz on this here island. The thin chap and his two mates also wanted to captoor you and yer companions for some reason or other. When the girl and that old Irishwoman 'scaped this morning, I thought the thin fellow would have a fit. He says he would give any money to catch them again, as he intended to strike you through them."

"He did, eh?" muttered Tom, hotly. "Well, we will fool Mr. Nicholas Flint. If he——"

Bang!

"Ooh! murder! have Oi kilt him? Is th' spalpane ded?"

"What's the matter?" hurriedly asked Tom, running to where Mary Ann was dancing about, holding a still smoking pistol at arm's length. Interrupted by the sharp report of a revolver, he had turned just in time to see the Irishwoman acting in the manner just described.

Violet—white as a sheet and trembling violently—was leaning against a tree, evidently almost scared out of her wits.

"What is the matter?" again demanded our hero. "What have you done?"

"Over there beyant th' clump av—av bushes, Oi saw

th' monkey face av that rogue, Nicholas Flint, a-peepin' at me, an' Oi fired th' gun before Oi t'ought. Tom, dharlin', go an' see if Oi kilt him."

"What! You saw Flint?"

"Yis, an' that baboon av a kid, Rufus Kane. Oi bet me hands are stained wid blood this blessed minute. Wirra! wirra!"

"I don't think you have hurt anybody, Mary Ann," said Tom, confidently, "so there isn't any use in carrying on like that. Are you sure you saw Flint and Kane?"

"Yis, it wuz thim, right enough. Th' thavin' scoundrels, Oi hope Oi did scrape thim a bit."

"We will soon see," replied Tom.

Picking up the gun he cocked it and advanced cautiously toward the bushes mentioned by the Irishwoman. He had hardly stepped from the shelter of the trees when a puff of white smoke came from behind a pile of decayed logs, and a bullet whizzed past his head.

Tom instantly leveled his rifle and fired two shots in close succession at the spot, then intrepidly rushed forward, recocking the rifle as he ran.

"Come back, Tom! You will be killed!" screamed Violet, terror-stricken.

Mary Ann dropped the pistol and grasping a thick club, sallied forth after our hero, her broad face expressing delight at the prospect of a scrimmage.

On reaching the place from whence the shot had been fired, Tom saw a cap lying upon the ground, but no other sign of either Flint or Rufus was visible.

"They have skipped," he said to Mary Ann, as she joined him. "Well, they know now that we are prepared, and I think they will go aboard again for reinforcements. We don't want to stay here a moment longer. Get Violet and the prisoners and we will hurry to the other end of the island. Perhaps the cutters have already arrived."

"Thin Oi didn't kill any wan, eh?" asked Mary Ann, rather disappointedly.

"Not a soul. Make haste now; I will wait here and keep a lookout for those scoundrels."

The Irishwoman soon returned with Violet, driving the prisoners before her, and the little party immediately set out for the nearby beach. The sailors asked to be released, but Tom grimly refused.

"I don't say you will go back on your word, men, but in view of my present small force I must be careful. As soon as we join our friends I'll untie your arms."

It took very few moments to reach the shore. Glancing down the level stretch of sand, Tom suddenly observed two figures creep from the bushes and make off at a rapid pace toward where the shore line curved from sight.

The distance was not too far for our hero to recognize the twain. It was Nicholas Flint and Rufus Kane.

Pointing them out to his companions, Tom said:

"There go the scoundrels now. They are bound for the yawl, I'll wager."

"Yes, and I think they're going aboard the bark for more men," spoke up one of the prisoners. "They know now that we have been took, an' I guess they haven't th' nerve to fight alone. That kid is a blamed coward."

"That's wot he is, an' his master isn't much better," growled the other sailor.

"We will follow at a respectable distance," concluded Tom, leading the way.

After traveling a quarter of an hour the party reached the turn in the coast and saw directly in front of them the *Nighthawk* standing back and forth under easy sail.

The yawl was just leaving the beach and Tom discerned Flint and Kane in the stern sheets. The sailors manning the boat were tugging at the oars as if in desperate haste.

Tom gave a shout of joy when he saw the cause of their commotion. Coming around the edge of the iceberg were the two cutters crowded with men!

"Blessed be th' saints!" ejaculated Mary Ann, fervently. "Now my dearie'll be safe wanst more. How

be-you-tiful thim boats do look a skimmin' th' wather to our rescue."

"The circumstances do certainly add to their appearance," replied Tom, laughing with the light-heartedness he had not felt for many hours.

Violet did not speak, but the expression of joy and relief upon her sweet face was more eloquent than words could be.

The cutters approached the island at a rapid pace, and it was not long before the little party on the beach could distinguish the faces of those in the boats.

"I don't believe they have seen us yet," remarked Tom. "We are standing here before a dark background and they will hardly sight us until considerably nearer the land. I can make out Chester, and the professor, and the old skipper in the first cutter."

"Phat is in thim boxes an' casks in the other boat, Tom?"

"It must be the stores they have saved from the yacht," replied our hero. "I am glad they have managed to secure something, but it's a bad sign. It looks as if the poor old *Explorer* is done for."

"I guess you will have to capture the *Nighthawk* to return home in," said Violet, brightly.

"We'll do it if we get half a chance, I can assure you of that."

"I have been thinking over a plan by which youse might captoor her," suddenly spoke up one of the prisoners.

"What is it?"

"Why, if you let me an' my mate here escape we'll pretend to steal one o' yer boats an' jine the barky again. Then to-night, when they ain't watchin', we'll let youse fellers come aboard and take her."

"A good idea, but we'll wait a while before trying it," cautiously replied Tom.

The man looked disappointed, but did not press his plan. He no doubt realized that Tom still regarded them with suspicion, natural under the circumstances.

By this time the yawl, carrying Flint and young Kane, had reached the *Nighthawk*, and the watchers on the beach saw the light craft quickly hoisted at the davits.

A few moments later several men ran aloft and loosened the fore and main topsails. These were hastily sheeted home, and before very long the bark was standing to sea under a press of canvas.

As she got under way, Tom and his companions moved down to the edge of the water, and were greeted with a hearty cheer by those in the approaching cutters.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PROFESSOR DISAPPEARS.

When the boats were finally beached, Chester was so impatient to land that he sprang into the water up to his knees and waded ashore.

He was met by Tom, and the two friends shook hands as heartily as if the separation had lasted a year instead of a few hours.

"By George! I am glad to see that you are safe!" cried Gage, his boyish face wreathed with smiles. "When the bark gave us the slip and sailed back in this direction I was afraid those scoundrels would capture you sure."

"Well, you see that I am still free," laughed Tom, "and so is Violet and Mary Ann."

Leaving him, Chester greeted that young lady and the Irishwoman, scarcely less enthusiastically than our hero. Mary Ann was so overcome with blithesome glee that she threw her arms around the embarrassed youth and gave him a resounding smack above his right eyebrow, at the same time shouting:

"Glory be to th' powers above, an' is it yersilf Oi'm risting me two eyes upon, Chister Gage. My! but you do be lookin' purty. Come to me arrums ag'in."

But Chester had retreated to a safe distance, where he stood ready to run away at the first sign of advance on Mary Ann's part.

The professor waited until the cutter in which he was seated had been securely moored, then he disembarked and after greeting Tom and the rest in an absent-minded manner, he hurried to the nearest bush.

Taking a magnifying lense from his pocket the eccentric scientist commenced a minute examination of the leaves, paying no further attention to the party.

"An' phat is th' matter wid th' ould felley?" asked Mary Ann, watching Professor Pickle with wide-open eyes. "Is he gone in his upper shtory, Oi dunno?"

"You mustn't mind him," smiled Tom. "He is looking for his onions."

"Onions? Well, he is a sinsible man, thin, fur Oi wouldn't mind running across an onion or a pratie mesilf, Oi do be that hungry."

"By Jove! I have totally forgotten all about eating," replied Tom, regretfully. "You must be literally starving, Violet."

"Now that we are all united I must confess that I could partake of a little food," acknowledged the young lady, demurely.

At that moment Captain Brett—who had been occupied in securing the cutters—came up and greeted Tom in his

bluff, hearty way. He also made his best bow to Violet and Mary Ann, which the latter recognized by a profound courtesy, saying to Chester, in an audible whisper :

“Phat a foine man he is, an’ handsome as a picter. Is he married, d’ye know?”

Before the mischief loving youth had time to reply, Tom proposed that immediate steps be taken to establish a camp.

“We must select a place sheltered from the wind, as the night promises to be cold,” he added, “and we must make haste if we expect to have everything snug before dark.”

“You are right there, lad,” replied the old skipper, squinting at the overcast sky. “Down in these latitoods they don’t have any twilight, an’ night will fall before we know it. While you and Chester finds a place, I’ll have the men land the stores and secure the cutters.”

“By the way, I want to ask one question before we begin,” hastily replied Tom. “Was any one hurt by the fall of ice?”

The excitement of meeting with his companions had driven all thoughts of the disaster to the *Explorer* from his mind until now.

“No; all hands escaped, barring a couple of slight bruises one of the fellers received while scrambling out of the way,” replied Captain Brett. “D’ye see, at that moment when the lump fell everybody was aft trying to

repair the yawl, as I'm told, and none of them got hurted much. It was a narrow escape, though."

"And the yacht? Is she totally wrecked?"

"I'm afeerd so. The whole bow is smashed, and the foremast carried away. Howsomever, we didn't have time to make a keerful examination."

"We will row over there in the morning and see," replied Tom. "If we can't repair her we'll see what can be done with the timbers."

At Chester's solicitation, our hero gave a brief description of the events that had occurred on the island since the cutters' departure in chase of the bark, stating that he would go more into detail after a while.

Before leaving in search of a camping place, Tom took a last look at the bark. She was standing toward the north under all sail, and had almost disappeared.

"It looks as if Nicholas Flint and his crew had quite enough of us," he said to Chester. "For my part, I hope they have."

"Don't be too sure of it," replied his companion, sagely. "Their skipping out in this manner may only mean a ruse to lull our watchfulness. I wouldn't be surprised to see them back to-night."

"Maybe so," said Tom, thoughtfully. "We must prepare for a visit, anyway. I think I will organize a regular

patrol force to walk the beach on all sides of the island day and night."

"That would be a splendid scheme," applauded Chester, as they walked up the beach. "Just start the thing and put me in charge of it, and I'll guarantee old Flint and his mates will have a warm time getting ashore."

After a brief search, a spot sheltered on two sides by hummocks of sand, and in the rear by a matted growth of bush and vines, was selected as the site of the camp.

A fire was immediately started in front, and Mary Ann set to work preparing the supper. Ample provisions had been brought from the yacht to last for several weeks, and twice as much remained on board, so there was but little danger of starvation.

Tom released the two prisoners, and after cautioning them as to their conduct, set both to work building a bower, or retreat, for Violet and the Irish maid.

Captain Brett and his sailors hauled the cutters high and dry on the beach, and then carried the various boxes and kegs to the vicinity of the camp.

The weather had cleared off slightly, and the snow had ceased falling, but there was a peculiar touch to the wind that proclaimed an impending gale to the old skipper's experienced mind. He seized an early opportunity to so inform Tom, adding:

"It can't do much damage here, but I'm afeerd it'll blow

that there iceberg out of our reach, and then we'll lose the yacht and the rest of the stores."

"That would be a calamity, indeed," replied the youth, gravely. "I don't see how we can help ourselves, though, without we take the boats and secure the stuff now."

"We won't have time before dark, and it'll be mighty risky rowing around in the open waters after nightfall if the wind increases."

"Don't it seem to you that the berg is much nearer than it was this morning?"

"Yes, come to think of it, I believe it is. I reckon the blamed thing is drifting this way. Howsomever, I guess we'd better take chances and not make a trip to-night."

To this Tom finally agreed, and shortly after, supper was announced by Mary Ann. When the party assembled around the improvised kitchen it was discovered that Professor Pickle was missing.

Tom sent several sailors in search of the old gentleman, but they returned presently with the announcement that he could not be found anywhere in the vicinity. Now thoroughly alarmed, Tom hastily divided his forces, and a few moments later the island was being thoroughly scoured.

An hour after dark the different parties straggled back into camp, all telling the same story. Professor Pickle had mysteriously disappeared!

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE HOLE IN THE GROUND.

The strange disappearance of the professor caused the utmost anxiety in Camp Violet, as Tom had named their present location. During the excitement incident to the establishment of the camp he had been entirely forgotten.

All knew his eccentricities, and but little attention was paid to his actions for the time being. Chester—who had been the last to see Professor Pickle—declared that he was at that time down upon his knees, digging at the roots of a shrub with an old knife.

“After that, he must have strolled off into the woods,” added Gage.

“Phy didn’t the ould fool bring a nurse, Oi dunno?” demanded Mary Ann, in disrespectful tones. “Phat business has he goin’ off an’ gittin’ lost, jusht whin Oi have a elegant stew all ready?”

When Tom returned to camp with his party, and found that nothing had been seen of the missing scientist, his anxiety increased.

“We must not rest until he has been found,” he said, with determination. “He could not have strayed far, I am sure. Half of you can remain here and eat supper,

while the rest continue the search. Chester, you come with me, and bring one of the lanterns."

After starting several small parties along the beach in both directions, Tom and his chum struck inland, for the center of the island.

"Confound it!" exclaimed the former. "I'll deputize a couple of men to watch him hereafter."

"The old gentleman is clean crazy over that onion, and actually don't know what he is doing," replied Gage.

"Well, I hope he finds a specimen and becomes contented. Whew! This kind of walking is no easy task after dark. Where on earth do you suppose the professor could have gone?"

"He may have fallen into the sea," suggested Gage, gravely.

"Great grief! I hope not," exclaimed Tom, stopping short, and looking at his companion. "I wouldn't have that happen for—what was that?"

A faint cry, as if from a man in deadly peril, came to their ears. The sound died away in a long, drawn-out moan, and was then repeated.

Tom and Chester stood as if transfixed for a second; then they began to beat about the bush in a frantic effort to find the place whence the appeal had come.

"It is the professor, and he is in great danger," panted

Tom, forcing the brush in front of him to one side. Pausing, he shouted at the top of his voice:

"Professor Pickle, where are you?"

Again the cry came, this time seemingly not a dozen yards in advance. Tom hastened forward, followed by Chester, but had hardly taken ten steps when he recoiled with an exclamation of surprise and excitement.

"What is the matter?" hurriedly asked Gage.

Without replying, Tom snatched the lighted lantern from his hand and held it up so the rays would illumine a dark spot in front of them.

"Jumping ginger!" shouted Chester, aghast. "That was a narrow escape for you."

Directly at their feet was a circular hole in the ground, apparently about six feet in diameter. Just below the level could be seen the sparkle of water, and as the twain looked, it seemed to be agitated, as if by some submarine monster.

Throwing himself to the ground, Tom leaned over the edge of the opening, and held the lantern well out. As he had suspected, he saw the familiar face of Professor Pickle directly beneath him.

The scientist was grasping a trailing vine with one hand, his body being partially submerged in the water, almost filling the cavity. On seeing Tom, he uttered a

feeble cry for help, and threshed out with his long legs in a futile effort to gain a foothold on the side.

"Courage, professor!" exclaimed our hero. "Courage! We'll have you out of there in a jiffy."

Springing to his feet, Tom hastily cut a vine strong and supple enough to bear a heavy weight. Fastening one end around a nearby tree, he told Chester to hold the lantern over the opening.

Then lowering the other end down to the professor, Tom bade him grasp it tightly, adding:

"Hold on with all your power, and we'll haul you up in no time, sir."

"I can't let go of this vine," came back, in feeble tones. "If I do I'll sink beneath the surface."

"Well, retain your grasp with one hand, and catch hold with the other."

"I can't."

"For Heaven's sake! why not?" asked Tom, impatiently.

"I'm using both arms now. I am holding a specimen of the genus *Allium* with my right hand," replied the professor, plaintively.

Tom glanced at Chester with such an expression of disgust that the latter exploded with laughter.

"Well, did you ever hear the beat of that in your life?" ejaculated the former. "There he is down in that hole, in

imminent danger of losing his life, and he refuses to be rescued on account of a confounded old onion."

"He is certainly a peculiar specimen himself," laughed Gage.

"We can't leave him here, that's certain. I'll try him again."

Bending over the edge of the opening, Tom called out:

"Professor, if you want to save your life you will have to do as I ask you. Drop that onion and grasp this vine, so we can pull you up. The longer you remain in that icy water the more exhausted you will become."

"Can't you reach down and take the specimen?" asked Pickle, pleadingly. "It is the only one I could find after a long search, and I wouldn't give it up for a fortune."

With an imprecation on botany in general, Tom told Chester to hold his legs while he secured the plant. After several attempts, he succeeded, and a few moments later the scientist was also drawn up to a place of safety.

"Now, for Heaven's sake, come to the camp and dry yourself," said our hero, passing the specimen over to its bedraggled owner.

"How on earth did you fall down that hole?" asked Chester, leading the way with the lantern.

"I was walking through this most peculiar forest of Antarctic palms searching for my precious specimen shortly before dark, and in stepping across a log, tumbled

right into that horrible cavity," explained the professor, carefully stowing his prize in his coat pocket.

"After I emerged from the water, I attempted to grasp the side, and my hand tore something away from the wall," he continued. "It was light enough for me to see that I had at last found the object of my voyage. It was a splendid specimen of the genus——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Tom, impatiently. "But do you know you came very near losing your life, and that you have also caused all of us a lot of trouble and anxiety? Now that you have found the plant, for goodness' sake, don't go wandering around scaring us to death."

"All right, Thomas," meekly replied the scientist.

"And another thing," spoke up Chester, chuckling to himself. "Mary Ann is as mad as a hornet, and I wouldn't be surprised to see her haul you over the coals for delaying her supper."

"Don't let that dreadful woman come near me, boys," exclaimed the professor, in alarm. "I'll promise not to bother you again, if you only make her keep away."

"Very well; we will chain her up on that condition," agreed Gage, with mock gravity.

A few moments later they arrived at the camp. The professor's appearance was greeted with genuine relief by all, and, although Mary Ann pretended to be angry at the

postponement of her supper, yet it was apparent that she, too, was greatly delighted at the scientist's return.

A messenger was sent to recall the other search parties, and then our hero and his companions partook of their first meal that day.

Four parties, of two men each, were selected as the first watch, and an equal number designated as their relief at midnight. Chester was placed in charge of the former, and Captain Brett told off to command the latter.

After all arrangements had been made, the little camp retired, to snatch what sleep they could, until a new day came, with its responsibilities and adventures.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN TERRIBLE PERIL.

The first rays of the sun found the camp astir. Tom awoke betimes and called all hands just as Old Sol peeped over the eastern horizon.

After breakfast, the young leader called a consultation of his aids—Chester and Captain Brett.

“We have a lot of work to accomplish to-day, and we must set about it at once,” he said, strolling down to the beach with them. “Our first duty is to secure the stores left aboard, and also make a thorough examination of the yacht.”

“I see one thing what pleases me,” replied the old skipper, running his experienced eye over sky and sea, “and that is a timely change in the weather. All them clouds have cleared away, you see. The wind has gone down, an’ if we was only a trifle farther north we would have a balmy day, I’m thinking.”

“And I see another thing that pleases me more,” chimed in Gage, pointing toward the distant horizon.

“What do you mean?” asked Tom, looking in the direction indicated.

"Why, the disappearance of the *Nighthawk*. She has gone."

"That's a fact. I hope she never returns."

"Amen!" exclaimed Captain Brett, fervently. "Them people aboard is a bad lot, and if the deep-sea sharks had their dues they would make a meal off the whole caboodle. Howsomever, I can't help but believe that we haven't seen the last of the barky. It won't do to relax our look-out just because she's out o' sight."

"Not by any means," firmly replied Tom. "They are treacherous enemies, and will employ treacherous means to circumvent us. Nicholas Flint is not the man to give up a chance for revenge so easy. And another thing, it seems from what one of our prisoners said, that Captain Scroggins found traces of a valuable treasure on this island during his previous voyage. Do you think for a moment such people as they would sail away and surrender it without any number of trials?"

"Not on your life," promptly acknowledged Chester. Then he added, quickly:

"A treasure on the island, eh? Whoop! That makes things interesting. After we are straightened up, we must organize a treasure party, and search for the hidden gold, or whatever it is."

"That can wait until we provide a means to leave the island," said Tom, gravely. "That is the burning ques-

tion of the hour, I can assure you. The professor told me last night that the water in the hole into which he fell is salt."

"Strange," remarked the old skipper, shaking his head.

"Not only strange, but serious," continued Tom. "We haven't a great deal of water on the *Explorer*, and there is every possibility the tanks forward were smashed by that fall of ice."

After a few moments of further conversation, Tom ordered Captain Brett to launch and man the two cutters for a trip to the iceberg.

"While we are away, you can take charge of the camp," he said to Chester. "Send a couple of trusty men to the other side of the island, as lookouts, and employ the others in arranging the camp for a stay. I guess the location is about as good as any we can find, so we will stay here until we are ready to leave, which I hope will be soon."

"How would it do to build a lookout place on one of those tall palms?" asked Gage. "One of the sailors can climb it, and it will be easy to construct a platform up there. A rope ladder can also be rigged from the top."

"All right. Go ahead and try it," approved our hero. "But whatever you do, don't let the professor stray away again and fall into any more holes."

"I'll deputize Mary Ann as a guard over him," grinned Chester. "He won't dare to stir then."

Shortly after, Tom and Captain Brett were on their way to the berg with the two cutters. It soon became apparent to them that the huge mass of ice had drifted considerably nearer the island during the night.

"I am glad to see it," remarked Tom, cheerfully. "I only hope the berg will touch shore. It will make our task all the easier."

On gaining the other side, they found the *Explorer* in her former position. The cutters were brought alongside, and the party boarded the yacht at the gangway.

The young leader now had an opportunity to see the damage wrought by the catastrophe of the previous day. Forward of the waist, the deck of the yacht was piled high with a mass of ice, in lumps of all sizes and shapes.

The foremast had been broken off a few feet above the pin rail, and the huge spar hung over the side, with a tangle of cordage trailing in the water.

The bulwarks had been carried away, and the forecastle leveled, and altogether, the scene was one of complete wreckage.

"All this looks bad enough, but it really amounts to very little if the hull is still sound," said Tom, going forward with the captain.

"Right you are, sir. I can patch up a jury-mast and straighten things around decks in no time, if the old hooker will float. Wait a moment, Tom, and I'll sound the well."

This telltale maneuver was speedily accomplished, and the result was very gratifying to the young leader and his companion. To their joy they found only nine inches of water in the bilges.

"By George! that is splendid news!" exclaimed Tom, shaking hands with the old skipper in his enthusiasm. "Now there is some hope for us, eh?"

"According to this, she must be as sound as a trivet below decks," replied Brett, with a chuckle of delight.

Proceeding forward, they examined the bows and side plates, and found but little permanent damage. It was now obvious to all that the *Explorer* had received only a trifling injury, and that her stability was not impaired.

"Set the men to work transferring all stores to the cutters," said Tom. "It will be necessary to lighten the yacht, anyway, I should judge, and we may as well land everything at once."

The sailors turned to with a will, cheered by the knowledge that they still had a vessel under their feet. When the boats were loaded, a quick trip was made to the island, and another cargo disembarked.

By noon, the *Explorer* was empty, with the exception of several tanks of water, which Tom concluded to leave on board.

While the men were thus engaged, the young leader and Captain Brett carefully examined the ledge of ice astern of the *Explorer*, finally reaching the conclusion that a number of charges of powder would crack the shelf sufficiently to form a channel.

"We may as well set about it this afternoon," suggested Tom. "Delay may be dangerous, and there is no reason why—— Great grief! what was that?"

They were standing aft, near the quarter, and, just as our hero was in the act of addressing the captain, a sudden tremor in the hull of the *Explorer* interrupted him.

Before Brett could reply, the deck upon which they stood quivered with a terrible strain, a deafening report sounded from, apparently, in the very heart of the mighty berg, and the summit was seen to totter and fall with a crash, directly ahead of the yacht.

The shock resulting from the stupendous mass of ice striking the outlying floe was terrific. Thrown to the deck, Tom and his companions lay trembling in every limb, expecting that each succeeding moment would bring destruction to all.

The old skipper was the first to arise. Staggering to his feet, he exclaimed, hoarsely:

"To the boats! To the boats! All hands!"

"What has happened?" gasped Tom, joining him.

"The berg is breaking up, and is liable to turn over at any moment," was the startling reply.

As if to give emphasis to the old navigator's words, the mountain of ice trembled to its very center, and then rocked back and forth so violently that the yacht slipped a dozen feet astern.

This was the last straw. Wild with fear, the crew tumbled pell-mell into the cutters, and shoved off before either Tom or the captain had time to follow.

Springing up on the after-rail, our hero, shook his fist at the recreant sailors, crying, huskily:

"Come back, you cowards! Would you leave us here to perish?"

His words had not the slightest effect. Rendered selfish by terror, the men pulled away from the yacht at their utmost speed, leaving Tom and Captain Brett staring after them in despair.

"We are doomed, Tom," said the latter, brokenly. "It is all up with us. I have seen these—look out! She is going! Heaven have mercy on——"

With a thunderous report, sounding to the imperiled

twain like the crack of doom, another peak became detached from the main part of the berg and fell. The central mass heaved convulsively, and with a terrific lunge, the *Explorer* was forced from the shelf and sent stern first out on the bosom of the ocean!

CHAPTER XXVI.

AFTER THE PERIL.

Thrown prostrate by the terrible shock, Tom and his companion were literally washed bodily into the scuppers by the tremendous rush of water over the stern.

There they lay, gasping and choking, and clinging tooth and nail to the bulwark stanchions for several minutes, during which time the yacht continued to roll frightfully from side to side.

At last—finding they were still alive, and with whole bones—both hastily scrambled to their feet, and gazed with wonder at the scene spread out before them.

Dotting the surface for a mile around, were innumerable fragments of ice, being tossed hither and yon by the agitated waters. Close to the island, was the main portion of the once mighty berg, now only a quarter of its original size, and entirely changed in appearance.

It was a truly wonderful transformation; but that which instantly riveted the attention of our hero and Captain Brett was the fact that the *Explorer* still floated, safe and sound.

When the knowledge dawned upon their still bewil-

dered minds, both wept for very joy, and solemnly clasped hands in the excess of emotion.

"It's too good to be true, Tom," exclaimed the old skipper, wiping his eyes, and then breaking out again. "I—I—can't understand it yet. I thought we were gone up—up the spout sure, that time."

"No, thank Heaven, it is a fact!" replied our hero, soberly. Then he suddenly jumped upon the cabin hatch out of the water which still encumbered the deck, and danced a rollicking jig, at the same time lifting his voice in such a series of whoops that Chester must have heard him on the distant island.

The old skipper stared at him in surprise for a brief period, then he, too, caught the infection, and if any one had been there to see it they would have looked upon the strange spectacle of a youth and a grizzled old seaman dancing a remarkable hornpipe for very joy.

This ebullition of spirits did not last long. Now that the safety of the yacht was assured, there was work to do.

Signaling the cutters, Tom shouted to the crews to come alongside at once, which they did, with downcast looks and shamed faces.

"Now, my men, I only intend to say a couple of words concerning your cowardly and despicable action in deserting us," said the young leader, sternly. "You were, no doubt, greatly frightened, but that is a poor excuse, and I

wish you to understand from now on, that not a cent will you receive from me on our return home, except your rightful wages."

"And what I have to say, you miserable sharks, is that I only wish we had a yardarm left to string your dastardly carcasses to," roared Captain Brett, wrathfully. "Now go for'ard and clear away that wreck, or I'll take a rope's end to ye."

The sailors slunk away and began the task thus ordered, and, be it said to their credit, they were as thoroughly a crestfallen lot as one would care to see.

At the end of an hour of hard work, enough sail was spread on the mainmast, and a jury stick set up forward, to force the yacht along at a couple of knots' speed.

Taking the wheel, Captain Brett steered the craft through the scattered fragments of the iceberg, and finally brought up within a few hundred yards of the island.

"Clear away the anchor for'ard!" he shouted, giving the wheel to Tom. "Stand by! Let her go!"

The chain rattled through the hawse-pipes as the heavy mass of iron plunged into the sea. Fathom after fathom paid out, until there suddenly came a cry from the bow:

"Sixty, and no bottom!"

"What! No bottom at sixty fathoms?" shouted the old skipper, aghast. "What kind of a place is this, anyway? Shut her off there and clasp a stopper on the cable.

Humph! No bottom, and within a stone's throw of the beach!"

"That reminds me that the bark was not anchored, either," spoke up Tom. "Maybe the island is of coral formation, and rises sheer from the sea."

"There's something blamed queer about the whole thing," muttered Captain Brett, shaking his head ominously. "In the fust place, what business has an island with palms and other tropical vegetation, doing down here in the Antarctic Circle. That's what I'd like to know. It's ain't natural."

"You are certainly right there," agreed Tom. "However, we'll talk that over later. Perhaps the professor can enlighten us. Last night he hinted at a discovery he had made, but he was so wrapped up in that confounded onion that I couldn't get anything out of him."

"We'll have to keep her under sail and stand on and off," concluded the old skipper. "Meanwhile, we had better go ashore and explain matters, or them people on the beach will be swimming off to us."

Tom glanced toward the island, and saw Chester and the entire occupants of the camp standing at the edge of the water. Young Gage was waving his arms like a wild man, and seemed on the point of casting himself into the sea, in his impatience to hear the news.

Violet was rapidly pacing up and down the beach in a

high state of excitement, and Mary Ann—that emotional Irishwoman—could be seen leaping in the air, and uttering such tremendous whoops of joy that Tom and the skipper hastened ashore, if only to quiet her.

They had hardly landed, when the crowd was upon them, all asking the most extraordinary questions in the same breath.

Chester grasped Tom's hand, and after giving it a hearty shake, said, with much feeling:

“Chum, I—I—thought it was all up with you, indeed I did. Thank Heaven you escaped from that frightful peril safely! By Jove! When the berg split up and turned over, I just fell down on the ground and—wished that I was dead.”

At that moment, Mary Ann burst into tears and threw her arms around Captain Brett's neck, with a suddenness that almost felled him. Before the astonished skipper could escape, she was weeping down his back, saying, between sobs:

“Achone! an' Oi t'ought ye wuz dead, too. Oi am so glad yez have come back to yer own Mary Ann. Don't run any more such risks, captain, dharlin'.”

The look on the old skipper's face was comical in the extreme. He gasped forth a request for her to release him, but Mary Ann clung to him like a leech, and it required the services of three men to separate them.

After that, it was noticed that the old mariner wore a hunted look, and dodged every time the Irish maid glanced in his direction.

Violet's greeting, although reserved, was warm, and Tom took occasion to explain the incidents of the day to her alone, while the captain enlightened the others.

Even the professor forgot his specimens for the time being, and received our hero with open arms. After a while dinner was prepared, and every one sat down with a feeling of thankfulness that none were absent by reason of the stirring events of the morning.

It was decided to repair the yacht before embarking, so, after an afternoon's hard work, the party again went into camp for the night. Sentries were posted, as before, and all went well until shortly before the time for calling the second watch. Tom was stretched out under a couple of blankets, not far from the fire, sleeping the sleep of youth, when he was suddenly awakened by Chester who whispered excitedly :

"Tom, Tom! wake up and call all hands! The bark has just been sighted creeping up on the other side of the island! Hurry! She is already near the beach!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

TOM IS CAPTURED.

When Chester called Tom so unceremoniously, shortly before the midnight, and gave him the startling information that the *Nighthawk* was stealthily approaching the other side of the island, our hero sprang to his feet and immediately sounded the alarm.

Arousing the old skipper—who was sleeping nearby—Tom bade him take a squad of men and hurry to the scene of the expected attack.

“Now, chum, I am going to delegate to you an important charge,” he added, to Gage, after seeing Captain Brett on his way.

“Send me around with the cutters to head them off?” eagerly replied that impetuous youth.

“No; I want you to take three men and watch the camp while the rest of us are away. In fact, I wish to place the safety of Violet and her maid in your hands, and——”

“You stay here, Tom,” interrupted Chester, impatiently. “You are the one for that business.”

It was plainly evident Master Gage desired to be present in that locality where the most fighting was to be anticipated. Tom was obdurate, however, and, after ad-

monishing his chum anew, he left for the opposite side of the island with another party of his fighting force.

He had not forgotten to explain matters to Violet, assuring her that little danger need be expected from the enemy after all, as the two crews were about equal in strength.

The trip across the island was made in short order. On reaching the spot designated, Tom found that Captain Brett had stationed his men at intervals along the beach, with instructions to reserve their fire until he gave the word.

A wintry moon, beaming cold and clear from the heavens, furnished sufficient light to render objects visible at some distance off shore, and by its aid the young leader saw the black hull of the *Nighthawk* lying motionless in the water, within a mile of the island.

Two dark spots midway between the ship and the island were easily distinguishable as boats, evidently filled with men. They were being softly rowed toward the beach,

Tom thanked the inspiration that had caused him to station guards on all sides of the island. If it had not been for the forethought, Nicholas Flint and his companions would have undoubtedly surprised the camp during the night.

"I see that we are just in time," he said, joining Captain Brett.

“Ye’re right there, sir. Just in time to give them fellers a warm reception, and we are going to do it, eh? It’s a good opportunity to teach them a lesson they won’t forget in a hurry.”

“What do you suggest, captain?” asked Tom, keeping his eyes on the approaching boats.

The old navigator shifted his quid thoughtfully, and then replied in no uncertain tone:

“Let them land, and then pour in a volley slap bang! What’s left we can capture and hold as prisoners. That’s my idea.”

Tom smiled, but shook his head emphatically.

“Looking at it from one point of view, your plan is the best. It would certainly rid us of those scoundrels, but I can’t bring myself to such a cold-blooded slaughter,” he replied.

“They would do the same by you.”

“Acknowledged. But we hardly occupy their level. No; I think the best plan would be to fire a volley now and drive them away. It will show them that we are alert, and they won’t try to land.”

“Ye’ll live to regret your soft-heartedness,” growled the old skipper, evidently disappointed. “They will only come back again when we ain’t watching so keerfully.”

“But we must continue to watch carefully while we are on the island,” replied Tom. “No, captain, I don’t want

to cause any suffering when it can be avoided. Give your men orders to fire in the air now; the boats are near enough."

The old skipper obeyed, but with very bad grace. He spoke a few words to the sailors nearest him, and a second later several reports rang out simultaneously.

The effect was not as Tom had anticipated or desired.

Instead of retreating, the boats from the bark separated, and pulled for the beach at their utmost speed. It was plainly evident the crews did not intend to be thus frightened off.

Despite the seriousness of the moment, Captain Brett could not refrain from indulging in a hearty chuckle of satisfaction.

"Now will ye shoot to hit?" he asked.

"Yes, and their blood be on their own heads," was the determined reply. "I have given them a chance, but they are looking for a fight, so we will try to satisfy them."

Tom had ten men at his command, including the old skipper and one of the prisoners. Three had been left in camp to assist Chester, in case any of the *Nighthawk's* crew should succeed in crossing the island.

Dividing his force, Tom sent Captain Brett with one party down the beach to meet the yawl heading in that direction, while he remained with five men to receive the

longboat, which was the larger of the two, and contained a greater number of the enemy.

By the time all preparations had been made, the attacking force had arrived within a hundred yards of the beach. Still loath to shed blood, Tom called out, in a loud voice:

“Keep away, you men from the *Nighthawk*, or we’ll fire! We are prepared for you. This is the last warning!”

A derisive shout came from the longboat, and then one of the men sitting in the stern, discharged a pistol point-blank at the speaker.

This insolent defiance brought a speedy response from those on the shore. Without waiting for their leaders to give the word, the men sent a volley in the direction of the approaching boats.

The sharp reports were instantly followed by a chorus of groans, and then two members of the yawl staggered to their feet and fell across the gunwale.

“Give it to them again,” cried Captain Brett, huskily. “The treacherous sharks ain’t got any right to live. Give it to them, boys!”

Once more the spiteful crack of the rifles was heard, and this time the attacking party was thrown into such confusion that the men ceased rowing. It was not for long, however.

“Rally, men!” came the command, in the well-known voice of Nicholas Flint. “One more spurt and we’ll make the beach. Remember the treasure!”

The magical word acted as a spur upon the crew, and they took to the oars again with such a vim that both boats were in the inner line of breakers before Tom and his companions could fire another round.

A hand-to-hand conflict was inevitable.

Seeing this, the young leader and Captain Brett, each in charge of his respective party, rushed down to the water’s edge, discharging their revolvers as they ran.

“Don’t let them land! Shoot them down in their boats!” cried Tom.

The skipper repeated the order at the top of his stentorian voice. An answering cry came from Nicholas Flint—a cry so cruel and revengeful that our hero became wild with anger.

“At them, bullies! Sweep the curs from the island! Half my share of the treasure to the man capturing Tom Truxton!” were the words he heard.

A moment later, the forces under Tom and the captain were up to their knees in the breakers, engaged in a desperate struggle with the enemy. They arrived just in time to prevent them from leaving the boats, and for a brief space the combat raged in the midst of the spume and

spray tossed up by the waves as they rolled upon the shingle.

Back and forth surged the antagonists, now one side claiming a temporary victory, only to have it wrested from them by a successful *coup*. After several ineffectual efforts, Nicholas Flint and his crews succeeded in forcing their way from the boats.

The fighting was now more even. Man to man, the combatants found themselves with none to spare. Guns and revolvers had been abandoned, or were used as clubs at short range.

At the beginning of the fight, Tom was arrayed against a stalwart sailor, who stood wielding the broken end of an oar as a child would a feather. This giant had already placed one of the island force *hors de combat* when the young leader stepped into the breach.

Tom saw at a glance that he could not cope with the fellow, physically. He was but a youth, and knew full well that only an ignominious defeat could result without he called some other power than bare muscular force to his aid.

All this flashed over his mind while the sailor was poisoning his club for a blow. In the moonlight Tom saw a sneer of contempt creep over the fellow's face, then just as a taunting laugh came to his ears, Tom found an ally, and used it.

It was a revolver, lying on the sand away from the water's edge. Knocked from the hand of some struggling fighter, it lay there cocked and primed. It was but the work of a second to snatch up the weapon.

A quick aim—taken haphazard—a flash and a snappish report, and the herculean sailor dropped his cudgel, reeled backward, and fell into the breakers with a sullen splash.

Tom permitted himself a short word of congratulation, and then turned to find a stocky-built youth at his side. It was Rufus Kane. The recognition was mutual.

Breathing defiance, the two ancient enemies sprang at each other, and in a moment were locked in a desperate grasp. An athlete from training, sturdy and strong from a life spent in the open air, and amid vigorous pursuits, Tom found no trouble in conquering Kane. Giving him a skillful twist backward, he threw the bully into the water, and then was just in the act of seeking another foe when the stock of a gun descended upon his head, and he fell senseless at the feet of his assailant—Nicholas Flint.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

RUFUS AMUSES HIMSELF.

Captain Brett had fought several hard battles in his life. A veteran of the Civil War, he could tell of many hotly-contested combats, and "warm corners" on various battle-fields, but he had never before found himself so hard pressed and thoroughly well occupied as on the sandy beach of the little island that night.

The men in the yawl fought like fiends. Ever and anon, when it seemed as if the sturdy skipper was getting the best of it, some one would call out hoarsely:

"The treasure! Remember the treasure!"

Then with wild whoops of defiance, the sailors from the bark would gain renewed strength, and attack Brett and his contingent so lustily that they would be forced to give way.

Once only did the skipper find time to look over to where Tom was engaged. What he saw at the moment was encouraging, and he fell to again with a vim.

It was when the youth had just sent the giant sailor to oblivion.

The captain did not see the subsequent struggle with Rufus Kane, nor the cruel blow that sent his young com-

panion headlong upon the sand, unconscious. Neither did he see Nicholas Flint toss up his hands in exultation of spirits at the success of his shrewd stroke, nor behold him hastily drag Tom to the longboat, assisted by Kane, but that was what happened.

While the *Explorer's* crew were engaged in a fierce and absorbing physical argument with the mariners from the bark, Tom's two arch enemies finally contrived to bundle him over the gunwale into the bottom of the craft.

Then Nicholas Flint blew a shrill blast upon a whistle. It was the signal for retreat. The sound had hardly died away when several sailors were assisting Flint to shove the longboat free from the shore.

A moment later, all those able to move lively, had scrambled aboard, and the craft was speedily thrust beyond the line of breakers. At first, the other side thought it was an ignominious flight, and they gave vent to several triumphant cheers.

Then Captain Brett saw that Tom had disappeared, and he instantly divined the truth. Wild with wrath and despair, he rushed into the water and attempted to reach the longboat.

He was too late. Only a mocking shout crowned his efforts.

"Men, those scoundrels have captured Tom!" shouted

the skipper, in an agonized voice. "Don't let them escape! After them. Seize that other boat!"

But in the meantime, the crew of the yawl had taken advantage of the excitement, and were just in the act of shoving their craft clear of the beach when Captain Brett's order was given.

Several of the yacht's sailors made a desperate attempt to stop them, but the effort came tardily, and the yawl was soon following the longboat.

A desultory fire was opened on the retreating boats, but without effect. At last, the skipper saw that Tom was past deliverance, and he gave free vent to his emotions in a string of imprecations, which, if not effective, no doubt relieved him vastly.

"It's not only the losing of him," he said to the man nearest him, "but now I have got to go back to the camp and face that girl who loves him, and his chum, and the rest. No, by Jupiter! I'll have that lad out of the clutches of them rogues if it costs me my life! Back to the camp and launch the cutters! We'll follow them to the infernal regions!"

The dead—of which there were three, one of the *Explorer's* crew, and the remaining two of the enemy—were given a hasty burial in the sand; the injured were patched up as well as possible, and then the party struck across the island at their utmost speed,

In the longboat, Nicholas Flint and young Kane were holding a jubilee over their captive, who had recovered from the effects of Nicholas Flint's dastardly blow, but was now lying, trussed hand and foot, in the bottom of the boat.

Giving the prisoner a brutal kick, Rufus asked with a malicious grin :

"Well, Tom Truxton, how do you feel now, eh?"

Tom made no reply.

"It took us a long time to get hold of you, but I guess we have succeeded at last," continued the stocky-built youth. "Now we will show you what revenge is, eh, Flint?"

"There are a great many entries against his name," replied Tom's late guardian, suavely. "But I think we can wipe out the score before long."

"That we will, but we must have a little fun first. I want to get hold of Chester Gage, and that old fool of a professor, and Tom's sweetheart, and set them up in a row on deck so that they'll have front seats at his punishment."

"Don't leave out Mary Ann," added Flint, chuckling.

"Confound Mary Ann!" exclaimed Rufus Kane, his gayety changed to sullenness.

Giving Tom—his helpless prisoner—another kick, he continued :

"I'll never be satisfied until I tie a stone around her neck and pitch her into the sea. I have the marks on my face yet where she whacked me."

By this time the boats had almost reached the bark, which was lying to, with sails aback, awaiting them. Leaning over the after rail was Captain Scroggins. His right arm hung in a sling over his breast.

"How did ye make out?" he bawled. "Did them fellers drive ye away?"

"No; we retreated in good order," replied Flint. "We got what we went for!"

"What! Did ye git the treasure?" came the question, eagerly.

"No, but we got almost as good a prize. We have Tom Truxton."

"Whoop! Bring him aboard till I clap my peepers on him. I want to see the feller what caused all this trouble, a-keeping me away from my island. I'll hang him to the yardarm as a warning to the rest; that's what I'll do."

Poor Tom was bundled over the gangway with little ceremony. Casting off the lashing around his legs, Flint bade him stand up. Cramped from the confinement, he did not move quickly enough to suit the speaker.

Grasping him roughly by the collar, Nicholas gave him a jerk, and then thrust him against the mainmast so violently that Tom almost cried out with the pain.

"You brute!" he cried. "You would not dare do that if my hands were free."

"Shut up, or I'll give you a taste of a rope's end," replied Nicholas, fuming with rage. "I'll have you understand that you are in our power now. If you don't realize it, you will before long."

The last sentence was uttered so grimly that Tom shuddered, in spite of his brave nature. He felt that he was in a desperate situation. A prisoner in the hands of his implacable enemies, and confined on board a vessel where his friends could not reach him—small wonder that he almost lost heart.

He resolved to show a bold front, and not permit any of his captors any satisfaction from taunting him. Facing Captain Scroggins, who had just stepped up, he said quietly:

"I see you bear the marks of our machine gun. You can thank your lucky stars the cutters were compelled to stop the pursuit, or else you and your fine companions might be prisoners, instead of I."

"Talk's cheap, my lad," replied the captain, with a grin. "What might have been has nothing to do with it. We've got ye now, and ye'll dangle at the end of one o' them yards before ye're many days older."

"I think we had better stand out a little farther from

land," suggested Flint, joining them. "They might take a notion to attack us."

"They ain't got nothing except the cutters, and we can soon git out o' their reach."

"Ah, ha! They don't know yet that we have saved the yacht," muttered Tom, seeing a glimmer of hope in that discovery.

"However, I guess we had better do as you say," continued Captain Scroggins, finally. "It's always best to be on the safe side. We'll drop the island astern seven or eight knots, and wait until morning."

Tom was taken aft, and locked up in one of the state-rooms. The bark was put before the wind, and presently, watchful eyes on the island saw her fade away in the distant gloom, like a foul bird of the night.

CHAPTER XXIX.

TREASURE ON THE ISLAND.

The news of Tom's capture was received at the camp with the greatest consternation. At first Chester refused to believe it, and rebuked Captain Brett for hazarding such a joke. When he saw that it was true, the faithful lad had hard work keeping back the tears. Violet—who was up, awaiting the return of the party—became very white when she heard Captain Brett's sorrowful voice give the bad tidings, and had it not been for Mary Ann's sheltering arm, she would have fallen.

"Cheer oop, dharling," said the Irishwoman, soothingly. "Tom's worth twinty dead min yet. He's only a prisoner, an' it's th' loikes of him as'll show thim spalpanes a thrick or two. Now go insoide th' tint, dear, an' wait till Oi git th' full particulars."

When Violet crept sadly into the canvas tent, Tom's thoughtfulness had provided for them after the saving of the yacht, Mary Ann strode forth into the circle of light cast by the camp-fire.

Her eyes were blazing with excitement, and her breath came in short, quick gasps. Snatching up a cutlass lying on the ground, she said, sternly:

“An’ phat be yez doing shtanding here whoile yer master is a prisoner in th’ hands o’ thim villains? An’ is it talk ye must, whin yez should be acting? If there be no man among yez to lead thim sailors, Oi’ll do it, an’ glad av th’ chance.”

Professor Pickle, who had been wringing his hands, and evidently overcome with emotion, stepped forward, and, to the surprise of all, picked up a gun and ranged himself alongside of the Irishwoman.

“I am ready to go with you to rescue poor Thomas,” he said, quietly.

“Bully fur ye, ould man!” exclaimed Mary Ann, patting him on the back. “We’ll go, anyway, even if th’ rist don’t folly.”

“All this is nonsense and a waste of time,” spoke up Chester, sternly. “Do you think for a moment we are not going to his rescue? There isn’t any use in pursuing the bark with the cutters, as she has put to sea. What we must do is to fit up the yacht as quickly as possible, and attack the *Nighthawk* from her deck.”

This view of the case was so obviously sensible, that even Mary Ann saw the wisdom of it. No time was lost in further arguments. Every man able to work hurried aboard the *Explorer*, and under the experienced guidance of Captain Brett, the yacht was soon being placed in temporary repair.

It was not an easy task. The jury masts had to be strengthened; ropes and stays and running rigging rove anew; the decks cleared and braced up forward, and new sails bent, fore and aft.

To add to the delay, the moon vanished behind a heavy bank of clouds, leaving a darkness so intense that the men found it very difficult to work with any degree of speed.

"As this is going to be a chase, we'll save more time by doing good work now," replied the old skipper, to an impatient remark from Chester. "S'pose we rush out with the sticks all a-wobble, and then carry something away just at the critical moment, eh? That would put us in a nice fix, now, wouldn't it?"

It was almost daybreak before the yacht was in readiness to sail. Just as the first grayish light heralding the coming of dawn appeared, Captain Brett informed Gage that the pursuit could be commenced at once.

"Now, the question is," he added, "who's going, and who will stay behind?"

"I was thinking about that," replied Chester, reflectively. "It won't do to take Violet and Mary Ann with us, as they would only be in the way, and if it comes to a fight, they might get hurt."

"We've got two wounded men. Why not leave them and the professor in charge of the ladies?"

"That will do."

"Professor Pickle can take command of the home force, eh?"

"No, indeed. Mary Ann is the one for that. She's worth ten professors in a scrimmage. Not that I expect any trouble, but it is always best to be prepared."

Leaving the skipper to finish the preparations, Chester hurried ashore, and told the Irishwoman of the new arrangements.

"Now, I am going to leave you in charge," Chester added. "You will have Tompkins and Jones and the professor. If the bark should slip by us and approach the island, you had better retreat to the interior."

"That's all very well to say, Mr. Gage, but phy should Oi remain here, whin there's a chance av a little fun where ye're going?" protested Mary Ann.

"But if we take you, we'll have to let all the rest go," replied Chester. "And you know that the yacht will be no place for Violet when there's fighting."

"Well, well; don't say no more," Mary Ann sighed. "It's me luck to be cut off from all enj'ymment in this worruld."

"Chester, do your best to save poor Thomas," said Professor Pickle, wistfully. "I would give everything I possess if he was here now, instead of in the power of those wretches. I blame myself for all this trouble. If I had

not been so eager to come down here this would not have happened."

"I feel sure that everything will come out all right," responded young Gage, cheerfully. "Nicholas Flint knows well that if harm comes to him he'll have to answer for it. I think that he only wants to hold him as hostage, to exchange for the treasure they say is on this island."

"A treasure on this island?" echoed the professor, in surprise. "What do you mean?"

"Why, a gold mine or something that Captain Scroggins says he found during his first voyage down here."

"The captain of the *Nighthawk*, nor no other mortal, ever found a gold mine on this island," emphatically replied the professor.

"Why not? Isn't it possible?" asked Chester, wonderingly.

"No; it is absolutely impossible."

"Why?"

"Ye're wastin' precious toime argyfyng here," interrupted Mary Ann, impatiently. "Tom could be kilt an' heaved into the ocean while yez be talkin', an' talkin', an' talkin'."

Violet, pale, and with traces of recent tears in her eyes, came out of the tent, and walked down to the boat with Gage.

"Chester, if—if you only save Tom from his enemies,

I'll—I'll be your debtor for life," she said, tremulously. "Do your best, please."

"Violet, I have only one life, but if I had a thousand I would lay them down to save Tom from harm," replied Chester, simply. "Now, don't worry, but keep up your spirits, and be prepared to welcome us when we return."

Ten minutes later, the *Explorer* spread her crippled wings, and stood around the southern point in search of the bark. The little party remaining on the island watched her disappear from sight with heartfelt prayers for the success of the expedition.

"Now, there ain't any use av us shtandin' here an' wringin' our fists," said Mary Ann, practically. "We will git breakfast, an' eat a little, whoile they go after Tom. It's daylight already, an' Oi do be wantin' to cross over an' see the fight in a few minutes. It's meself—— Holy mither! Phwat is the matter wid the professor?"

While Mary Ann was speaking, the professor suddenly uttered an exclamation of horror, and pointed with one shaking hand, toward the northern end of the island. Glancing in that direction they saw the *Nighthawk* slip into view, and stand toward them. Hanging at the end of the starboard main yardarm, was the figure of a youth, idly swinging in the wind!

CHAPTER XXX.

TOM TRIES AN EXPERIMENT.

Tom's thoughts were not of the most pleasant description when he found himself a prisoner in the little state-room on board the bark. He had been thrust through the doorway in no gentle manner, and told to prepare himself for an early swing at the yardarm.

This was not encouraging, to say the least. Then, added to that, his head ached frightfully from the shrewd blow given him by Nicholas Flint, and he also set to thinking about his present situation, and Chester, and Violet.

His arms were still bound, but his legs were free. Staggering to his feet, he walked around the narrow apartment, and finally tumbled over into the bunk, where he lay, taking what ease he could under the circumstances.

"By George! this is what you might call a deuce of a fix," he muttered. "It certainly looks as if I am a goner this time, sure! Old Flint and the rest have the upper hand now, and if Chester doesn't succeed in rescuing me, I guess I'll swing for it."

Made restless by the thought, Tom scrambled to the

deck, and began pacing up and down the seven feet of space forming the stateroom.

"If I only had my hands free, I might stand some show for my life. Whoever tied them made a pretty good job of it. I'll wager it wasn't either Kane or Flint. Oh! if I could only get the use of one arm even."

While talking to himself, Tom tugged at the lashing until the veins in his arms stood out like whipcords, but without avail. The rope had undoubtedly been placed there by an experienced sailor.

Suddenly a voice in the outer cabin attracted the prisoner's attention, and he ceased his efforts and listened intently.

"I tell ye, I'm for keeping him over to swap fur the treasure. Wot's the use of fighting them people, and losing of valyble seamen, when we can trade off this here Tom Truxton for wot we came down here for."

"Confound the treasure! We will get that also!" replied the well-known voice of Nicholas Flint. He spoke angrily, and seemed greatly excited. After a brief pause, he added, in the same tone:

"I am going to see that young scamp hanging at the yardarm before noon, and you might as well make up your mind to it, Captain Scroggins. We will secure the gold all right enough, don't be afraid of that. There is no great hurry."

"Well, have yer own way," sullenly replied his companion. "I don't care a rap wot yer do with the young feller, so you help me git that air treasure."

The speakers moved away, still conversing. Just before they passed out of hearing, Tom heard the captain mumble something to which Nicholas Flint made reply:

"That may answer for the time being. I will think about it."

When they had finally gone, Tom drew a long breath, and muttered:

"That's like a fellow hearing his death warrant read. What a bloodthirsty old wretch Nicholas Flint is! Well, if I am going to escape from the necktie party they have in mind, I must be setting about it."

Though the words were careless, yet our hero felt the gravity of his position, and his heart sank within him as he realized that the coming of another day might end his career in this world.

Tom was young, and youth is hopeful, yet when he strove again to break the cords binding his arms, and only succeeded in causing himself needless pain, he almost gave up in despair.

Leaning against the bunk, he thought, long and deeply, of the many ways he had read by which prisoners had managed to escape. Among others, he remembered a case where a young naval officer, captured by Chinese pirates,

had torn away his bonds by the aid of a long spike found driven in the side of the junk's hold, in which he was a captive.

"Now, if I can run across a nail or a spike in this state-room, I'll try his scheme," thought Tom. "The worst I can do is to fail. Anything is better than this inaction."

Stepping away from the bunk, he edged along the bulk-head until he reached the door. Nothing bearing the slightest resemblance to a spike had he encountered.

He tried it again, this time taking the opposite side of the apartment. Slowly and carefully, he rubbed his shoulder over the smooth surface, taking pains to not leave an inch unexplored.

"As poor old Chester would say: 'I'll bet a dog I don't find——' Ha! what's this?"

His head had just grazed some projection. Straining his eyes he saw by the aid of the faint light flickering through the latticework of the door from the outer cabin, a hook screwed into the wood.

For a moment, Tom felt as delighted as if he had found a gold mine. But the impression faded quickly. The hook might mean a way to freedom, and then it might not.

Would it be strong enough? Could he reach it with his arms tied behind his back? The last question Tom re-

solved to ascertain at once. Kicking a stool over against the bulkhead, he mounted it, and then, placing his back to the wall, elevated his arms as far as he could.

The first attempt resulted in failure. Trying again, he managed to catch the hook with the lower turn of the rope. Giving a strong tug, he felt it slip a trifle.

Greatly encouraged, Tom repeated the operation several times, and at last had the huge satisfaction of feeling one coil drop from his arms. Three turns still remained.

Taking a better purchase, he prepared to give a final tug, when the bark gave a sudden and unexpected lurch. A few seconds later, Tom found himself sprawling upon the deck, with his nose skinned, and a lump over one eye, but he was free.

Disregarding the pain, he was just in the act of scrambling erect, when a hand shook the door, and mocking voice asked:

"I say there, Tom Truxton, how do you feel, eh? Ready for a rise in the world?"

"Yes, Rufus Kane," replied Tom, cheerfully. "I'm ready when you are."

"You won't speak so calmly when I put the rope around your neck, I'm thinking."

"There's many a slip between the prisoner and the hang-

man's knot," responded our hero, gleefully rubbing his hands.

"Well, there won't be any slip here. We're going to sail back to the island now, and when daylight comes, we intend to string you up in full view of your friends on shore. I'm going to take a spyglass and watch the tears in Violet's pretty eyes."

"Get out, you brute!" and Tom gave the door a wrathful kick.

"Ha! ha! I thought that would fetch you."

Before Tom could reply, Captain Scroggins shouted down the skylight for Kane to come on deck and trim sail, instead of "skulkin' around like a blasted landlubber."

It was now on the verge of dawn. The sickly rays of the cabin lamp had given way to a stronger refulgence. After waiting a while Tom tried the door, finding it locked. To a determined youth, this fact did not offer a very great obstacle.

Placing his shoulder against it, he easily forced a passage, and stepped into the outer cabin. Suddenly a feeble voice came from an adjacent stateroom:

"What is that noise out there? Is that you, Nicholas?"

"Ah, Cyrus Holt is still alive, I see," muttered Tom, recognizing the speaker. "But he don't talk as if he was

in the best of health. If I had time, I would pay him a call, for old acquaintance's sake."

Smiling at his own wit, our hero crept to the companion hatch, and peered out on deck. Flint and the captain were standing near the gangway, superintending the hoisting of a peculiar-looking object to the main yardarm.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE ESCAPE.

Tom gave a start of surprise when he recognized the object. Then he drew back and chuckled gleefully. It was a dummy, stuffed with oakum, that the men were swinging up to the end of the yard.

"That's me, I suppose," grinned Tom. "They are going to work some scheme and try to make Chester and the rest believe that I have been hanged. Well, it's better to stand here and look at the dummy than occupy its place, I must say."

Poking his head above the edge of the deck, he made another survey of his surroundings. Through a break in the rail, he saw the island just ahead. It was not over a mile away, and looked strangely out of place, with its nodding palms, in that dreary Antarctic latitude.

"The way we are heading now, we ought to pass very close to the northern end," mused Tom. "If I could only get overboard without any one seeing me, I believe I could make land. By George! I'll try it!"

It was no easy thing he proposed to do. In the first place, it was extremely doubtful that he could escape the eyes of the men on deck. Then, if he succeeded in gain-

ing the water unobserved, he would have to swim a long distance, and then risk the breakers.

One thing was in his favor—Tom was almost as much at home in the water as the proverbial duck. Although his life had been spent in New York, where “swimming holes” and convenient brooks do not exist, yet he had managed to acquire the art very thoroughly.

Waiting until the bark had arrived abreast the end of the island, he slipped off his shoes and coat, and then stole up the after companionway. A cuddy door opened out into a small space at the stern, where the wheel is situated.

He knew that a sailor would be stationed there as steersman, and that it would be even chances whether he could slip past him unseen. Cautiously opening the door, he peeped out. Luckily at that moment, the bark was put on the other tack.

This maneuver absorbed the whole attention of the man at the wheel, and Tom crept by him unnoticed. Hastily crawling over the rail, he clutched a rope dangling from it, and a moment later was in the water.

Diving down as far as he could, our hero slowly regained the surface, to find the *Nighthawk* some distance ahead. There were no signs of commotion on board the bark. His escape was evidently unknown.

After recovering his breath, he struck out for the nearest point of land. The water was icy cold, and at first it

seemed to him that he would never be able to reach the shore. The vigorous movement of his arms lessened the numbness after a while.

Finally, after a hard struggle, Tom crawled through the breakers, and fell exhausted on the sand, near the water's edge. The freezing touch of the wind soon started him to his feet.

Glancing seaward, he saw the bark ware around toward the camp. Happening to look in the other direction, he caught sight of another sail, just coming into view.

At first it startled him, then he smiled, and said, heartily :

“Ah ! Chester, old boy ; you are a little too late, but I am glad to see that you didn't intend to give me up without an effort.”

Tom would have remained to signal the yacht, but his wet clothes were too uncomfortable. Shivering with cold, he set off at a run, and presently arrived in the vicinity of the camp.

Creeping from bush to bush, he gained a spot where he could see the tent and the space leading down to the beach. Standing near the water's edge was Violet, with her hands clasped, and tears trickling down her fair cheeks.

Next to her stood Mary Ann, with an old apron thrown over her head, and her body rocking back and forth, while

a short distance away, was the professor, also displaying every evidence of grief.

"The deuce! What can be the matter?" thought Tom, aghast. Then a light flashed over his mind. Out to sea, within plain view of the camp, was the *Nighthawk*, and swinging at her yardarm, was a grewsome figure.

"I see now," murmured the youth, a lump coming up in his throat. "They think it is I. By Jove! it's—it's a peculiar experience. Something like reading your own obituary. God bless them! They—they must think a lot of me after all."

Tom wiped away a bit of moisture from his eyes, and then started out to announce his presence. As he passed the tent, he heard Mary Ann say:

"It can't be possible that thim villains has hung poor Tom. No, Oi won't belave it at all. It don't look loike him from here. He was that purty a b'y that Oi—Violet, dharlin', don't be cryin' so. Look at me, Oi ain't cry—— Boo! hoo! hoo! Tom, are ye dead an' gone? Is yer—— Murdher! Ghosts! Murdher!"

At that moment, her eyes fell upon Tom, walking toward her with his hair dank and dripping, and his face white with the salt water. To her he was a veritable spirit, and she hopped sideways, and yelled like one demented.

Violet turned at the sound, and fell in a swoon. Even

the professor was startled, but he speedily recovered. Rushing forward, he grasped Tom's hand, and shook it violently. Then throwing his arm around our hero's shoulders, he exclaimed:

"Thank Heaven for this mercy! Bless my soul, Thomas, is it really you in the flesh? How did you escape from those ruffians? Who is it they have hanged in that ferocious manner?"

These, and many more questions did the agitated old gentleman ask, all the while clinging to the youth, as if he expected him to take wings and fly.

Mary Ann had fallen to the ground, where she lay, near Violet, groveling in the extremity of terror. Walking up to her, Tom attempted to convince the superstitious woman that he was not a ghost just yet. It took plenty of persuasion and arguments, but he finally succeeded.

After expressing her joy at length, she set about restoring her mistress, while the young leader donned some dry clothing. By the time he had made himself more comfortable, Violet was waiting to see him.

The meeting between them was heartfelt. Violet was overjoyed at his escape, and showed it in many ways. After explaining his recent adventures, Tom hurried to the end of the island and signaled the yacht, which at that moment was in full pursuit of the *Nighthawk*.

"I wonder if old Flint and his precious companions

have discovered my escape yet?" chuckled Tom. "There will be great times on board when they do! Ah! they have seen my signal on the *Explorer!*"

After firing his revolver, he had waved his coat, from a prominent point near the water's edge. A moment later, a puff of white smoke came from the yacht's quarter; then he saw Chester clumb up the main shrouds and wave his cap.

The craft was instantly put about and headed for the camp. The bark continued on her way to sea, under a full press of canvas. After reaching a distance of seven or eight miles from the island, she hove to.

Tom returned to the camp, arriving there just as a cutter landed from the yacht. To say that Chester and Captain Brett were delighted to see him, would not be doing justice to their greeting.

The former shook our hero's hand so violently, that he was fain to ask for relief, and then the irrepressible youth actually embraced Mary Ann, to that woman's huge amusement.

Explanations were then in order, and when Tom had finished his description of events, young Gage told how he and the old skipper had made a solemn vow not to rest until revenge had been obtained to the fullest extent.

"We saw that thing hanging at the yardarm, you know," he added, "and we thought it was you. I tell you,

there was a warm minute or two on the yacht when we first caught sight of that dummy. But what do you suppose was Flint's idea in swinging it?"

"I don't know, unless he wanted to make you think I was dead. He would have killed me right enough, but the old skipper evidently persuaded him to wait a while."

"Perhaps it was Captain Scroggins' idea to hold you for a ransom?" suggested Violet.

"That is probably a solution of the question," replied Tom. "Well, they were fortunately foiled in their scheme. I'll wager there will be trouble on board when they find that I have flown."

"If they would only fight among themselves and exterminate each other, like the Kilkenny cats, it would be a good job," remarked Chester.

A call to breakfast from Mary Ann cut short the conversation, and all fell to at the bounteous supply of food with a will. The long swim had given Tom a ravenous appetite, and he did ample justice to the viands.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE PROFESSOR PREPARES A SURPRISE.

"I did intend to search for that treasure to-day," remarked Tom, after breakfast, "but I guess we had better take a much-needed rest first. We can lie around and watch the bark until to-morrow morning, and then look over the island for the wonderful gold mine, or whatever it is."

"The professor says such a thing is impossible," said Chester, remembering his conversation with the scientist.

"Says what is impossible?"

"Why, a gold mine, Thomas," joined in Professor Pickel. "You may find a treasure left here by some one, but as to running across a mine—this is not that kind of an island."

Recalling the various mysterious illusions made at odd times by the old gentleman, Tom pressed him to explain his words.

"You will know all in due course," was the unsatisfactory reply. "It's a little secret discovery of mine, and I want to retain it for a while."

"I'll tell you what's what," spoke up Captain Brett. "This whole blamed island is peculiar, to say the least.

What d'ye think the boys along Water Street, in New York, will say when I tell 'em that I saw a bit o' land in the Antarctic Ocean, covered with palm trees? A blooming, tropical island in almost fifty degrees south. Why, they'll think I have gone daft. Huh?"

"Probably run you for president of the Prevaricators' Club, eh?" said Chester, with a sly wink at Mary Ann.

"It's himsilf as is noice enough to be Prisident av th' United States, or—or Oirland," said the cook, giving the old skipper a languishing glance, to his evident alarm.

"The *Nighthawk* is out there, following the example of her namesake," remarked Tom, glancing toward the distant vessel. "She is hovering around, waiting for another chance to swoop down on us."

"I hardly think they will trouble us to-day," said Chester. "The crew must need a rest as badly as we."

"They can't have many men left," ventured one of the prisoners Tom and Mary Ann had captured on the previous day. He was an ill-favored seaman, named Bill Watkins, and had participated in the fight with his former companions.

"I think I noticed six, counting Flint and the captain," briefly replied Tom.

"When be you going to look for that treasure?" asked the other prisoner, with a glance at his mate.

"To-morrow."

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Rising to his feet, after giving the above answer, Tom beckoned to Chester, and strolled down to the beach. Captain Brett called out, as they were moving away, that he thought he would take a couple of men and do a little work on the yacht during the morning.

"I want to give you a bit of warning about those two sailors from the bark," said our hero to his chum, when they had passed out of hearing. "I don't trust them a little bit. During the fight last night, I noticed that Watkins kept out of the way as much as possible, and didn't do very much."

"They will bear watching, I guess. They are after that treasure, and if we don't find any, I think they will try to rejoin their mates again."

"If you notice any sign of treachery on their part, shoot them down as you would a dog. To-night, when the guard is set, just see that they are detailed in separate watches."

Nothing of interest occurred during the day. The old skipper tinkered at the *Explorer's* rigging simply because he could not remain idle. Tom and his chum overhauled the stores, assisted by several of the sailors, and Violet and Mary Ann seized the opportunity to patch up their wearing apparel.

The bark stood off and on within plain view, but did not approach near enough to cause alarm. The guards

were set that night, but were permitted to patrol the island undisturbed by the enemy.

On the following morning, shortly after breakfast, Tom made up a party, consisting of Chester, Professor Pickle, a couple of seamen and himself, to search for the alleged treasure.

It must be confessed that he had very little faith in the story, but did not care to leave the island with the question unsettled. The professor was anxious to go, for certain reasons of his own.

When the expedition was ready to start, Tom saw to his surprise that the scientist carried a ponderous volume under his arm. On being questioned concerning it, he refused to reply, other than by saying :

“Never you mind about this book, Thomas. We’ll need it before we finish the search.”

Seeing that it was useless to press the old gentleman, our hero gave the word to march. He was for striking directly into the interior, but the professor said, with a peculiar smile :

“I think you had better allow me to lead. I may bring you to the treasure more speedily than you imagine.”

Tom exchanged glances of wonder with Chester as they walked along at the heels of their new guide.

“The old fellow knows something, and he wants to give us a surprise,” whispered Gage. “He has been making

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short excursions into the interior every little while. What a foxy old codger he is."

When the detail was made up, Tom had simply called out for two men to accompany them. He now saw that Bill Watkins had volunteered, together with one of the *Explorer's* seamen.

His attention was attracted to the fact by the eager way in which Watkins followed the professor. It was plainly evident he was very anxious to sight the treasure among the first.

Resolving to keep an eye on him, Tom sauntered along with the rest. The professor led the way in such a confident manner that it was easy to see he had traveled the path before.

After covering a half mile, the guide turned sharply to the left, and advanced toward a break in the forest, through which a distant glimpse of the ocean could be obtained.

Suddenly pausing, Professor Pickle produced the volume he had been carrying, and, referring to a certain passage, read it to himself with every appearance of satisfaction.

Chester stole up to his side on tiptoe, and attempted to glance over his shoulder, but the scientist closed the volume with a snap, and walked ahead at a rapid pace.

The others rushed after him, and a moment later ar-

rived at a little clearing, extending to the beach. Halting near the last fringe of palms, Professor Pickle pointed ahead, and exclaimed:

“You see before you, not only the wonderful treasure, but a solution to the mystery of this most mysterious island!”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AN ASTOUNDING ANNOUNCEMENT.

The object that met the eyes of the little party when they ran forward at the professor's bidding was not one calculated to increase their eagerness.

Professor Pickle had exclaimed in a dramatic way :

"You see before you not only the wonderful treasure, but a solution to the mystery of this most mysterious island."

What they saw were simply the outlines of an old wreck crumbling away on a sandy hummock, several hundred feet from the beach. Only a part of the bulwarks was standing, but a jagged timber here and there traced the lines of what must have been a small sailing vessel of great antiquity.

"Great grief !" exclaimed Tom, pausing in astonishment. "What a peculiar old wreck. Where on earth did it come from ?"

"Go and examine it and I'll tell you afterward," replied the scientist, with a satisfied smile. "Surprised, eh? I thought you would be. But you will be more than astonished when I explain."

Accompanied by Chester and the two seamen, Tom ap-

proached the crumbling remains of what had once been a stanch sea-going craft. Climbing over the decaying bulwarks, he saw at a glance that some one had been recently engaged in shoveling away the sand upon the after-deck.

He glanced inquiringly at the professor.

"Yes, it was I," was the reply. "I have been here several times."

"What is it? What did you find?" asked Tom, rather impatiently.

"I have found the treasure."

Bill Watkins, the ex-prisoner from the bark, pressed forward and listened eagerly.

"Then there is a treasure?" replied Tom. "Where is it?"

Professor Pickle smiled and silently led the way to what had evidently been the cabin of the queer-looking craft. Two-thirds of the roof had fallen in, but a corner near the after end still remained.

Stooping under this, he drew forth an old iron-bound box. The wooden sides were still intact, but the lid had been wrenched off and thrown away. The contents were now covered with several palm leaves.

Every member of the little party craned his neck over the case and impatiently watched the movements of the scientist as he slowly removed the covering.

"Diamonds," breathed Chester.

"No; gold, gold!" said Bill Watkins, with a gasp of excitement.

The professor was enjoying their impatience as a cat would the terror of a captive mouse. At last he removed the palm leaves, exposing to view—a half dozen bars of dull gray metal and a score of yellowish coins!

Before he could be stopped, Watkins plunged forward on his knees and attempted to grasp the pieces of money. He was quickly seized and dragged back by Chester and Tom.

"What is the matter with you?" demanded the latter, sternly. "Do you want to be put in irons again?"

The fellow hung his head with a sullen air, but did not vouchsafe a reply.

Turning again to the treasure, Tom glanced at it rather contemptuously, and asked of the professor:

"Is that all you have found?"

"It is all there was to be found," answered Professor Pickle. "There is about four hundred dollars' worth of silver in those bars, and the coins are worth, on their face value, not more than three hundred and thirty dollars, or a total in all of seven hundred and thirty dollars in American money. Are you disappointed?"

"Well, I should say we are," spoke up Chester, blankly.

"From all the talk about it, I thought we would run across a hundred times that amount. Well, what a sell!"

Tom, who had been eying Watkins, saw him turn away and move his lips as if muttering a whole volley of imprecations. The fellow's sordid nature had evidently received a severe shock.

"Now it is time to explain how this ship came here and what it means to us," said the scientist.

"First, let us make sure of what little treasure there is," interrupted Gage.

Dumping the contents of the box upon the sand-covered deck, he wrapped up the bars and coins in a stout silk neckerchief.

"Now go ahead with your yarn," he said, in a matter-of-fact tone.

The professor beckoned them outside of the ancient craft, and pointing to a name painted on the stern, asked them to read it. The letters were dim with age and decay, but Tom managed to discover that they were old Dutch characters.

"You don't understand Dutch, eh?" remarked the scientist patronizingly. "Well, I will translate it for you. There are two words, and they mean, in English, '*The Speedway*.'"

"The *Speedaway*," echoed Tom in surprise. "Why,

you don't mean to say that this is the wreck of that Dutch yacht which was the first vessel to approach——”

“Yes, yes, you have hit it, Thomas. You have a splendid memory for historical facts,” interrupted the professor, approvingly. “This is the very same craft, or what is left of it. Let me read to you an extract from the ‘Encyclopædia Britannica’ of a late date. I will turn to page 4856, of the eighth volume, and see what it says about the vessel whose bleached and time-worn bones lie before us.”

With his companions watching him curiously, Professor Pickle referred to the book he had brought from camp, and read the following:

“The first ship that ever approached the Antarctic Circle was one of a fleet which sailed from Rotterdam under the command of Jacob Mahu as admiral, in June, 1598. She was called the *Speedaway*, a yacht of one hundred and fifty tons, with Dick Gerritz as her captain. She was separated from the rest of the fleet in Magellan's Strait, in 1599, and was carried by tempestuous weather far to the south, discovering higher land in 64 degrees. This appears to be the land afterward named the South Shetlands. Seven months later the *Speedaway* was cast on a tropical island off the coast of what is now Brazil. The crew escaped in the boats and were picked up by a sister ship of the fleet. Several years afterward, Captain Gerritz sailed

south again and attempted to find the island upon which his craft had been lost, but, strange to say, not a trace of the mysterious island could be discovered."

The scientist closed the book abruptly, and gazed at Tom with a peculiar smile.

"Wonderful, wonderful!" ejaculated Chester. "Is it possible this can be the same ship?"

Stepping closer to the name on the stern, Tom looked long and earnestly at the faded characters. Then turning to Professor Pickle, he asked:

"You say this is the *Speedaway*?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And is that description you have just read authentic?"

"I firmly believe so."

"The *Speedaway* was totally wrecked on a tropical island off the coast of Brazil?"

"Yes."

The professor actually beamed under the questions.

Tom mused a moment, walked down to the edge of the surf, and then returned with a confident step.

"Professor," he said earnestly, "this is the most wonderful find of the century."

"Then you understand how it all came about?"

"Yes."

“How did this wreck get down here, six thousand miles from the place where it occurred?”

“Easy enough, sir. The island brought it down. This island upon which we are now standing is floating at the mercy of the winds and currents!”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TREACHERY.

The first effect of Tom's remarkable statement was rather comical. Both Bill Watkins and the other sailor became as pale as their bronzed faces would permit, then turned and ran toward the palms.

"Hi, there!" shouted Tom; "where are you going? Come back here at once."

But his words only served to make the frightened men increase their speed, and they soon disappeared behind the nearest fringe of trees.

"The fools! What are they afraid of, I wonder?"

"They think the island is going about on the other tack, I suppose, and that it might capsize under a lee helm," grinned Chester.

Then he added, seriously:

"Chum, is it possible that this is a floating island? I can hardly believe it."

"It is so, nevertheless. We have indisputable proofs of the fact in the presence of this wreck. It must be as Professor Pickle says. He has deciphered the name on the stern, the very appearance of the craft denotes that it has

been here for almost three centuries, and then I noticed that the coins are of a date prior to 1599."

"Wonderful, wonderful!" was all Gage could say in reply.

"Now you can understand why I said it would be impossible to find gold mines here," said the scientist, smiling. "The crust of this remarkable island cannot be very thick, and if you were to sink a shaft, you would fall through the bottom before digging many feet."

"It explains the salty taste of the water you found in that hole, eh?"

"Yes; that was sea water."

"Captain Scroggins must have landed somewhere near this wreck, and on running across a few pieces of money, he thought there were more behind it, I suppose," remarked Chester.

"From what I can understand," replied Tom, "the bold skipper of the *Nighthawk* was frightened away by a sudden gale before he could investigate the wreck, which reminds me that we must sail from this place as soon as possible. This is the region of violent storms, and we must not run any chances of losing the yacht, now that we have saved her from the berg."

"Professor, how do you suppose the *Speedaway* happened to be carrying these bars of silver?" asked Gage, as they prepared to return to the camp.

"It was a common form of conveying treasure in those days. Captain Gerritz may have thought it more convenient to have his valuables in that shape, or, again, he may have obtained the bars from the natives. They certainly look crude enough for that."

"Then all this stuff is only worth a paltry seven hundred and odd dollars, eh?" continued Chester, in an aggrieved voice.

"That is all."

"Humph! no wonder Bill Watkins was disappointed."

"We must keep an eye on that individual and his mate," remarked Tom. "I have an idea their loyal feeling toward us was mainly stimulated by the possibility of securing a generous slice of the treasure."

Still conversing over the wonderful wreck and its silent tale of centuries past and gone, the little party made their way back toward the camp.

Suddenly, while passing through a clearing not far from the beach, the sharp, spiteful report of a rifle came to their ears. It was immediately followed by another, and then several shots in succession rang out.

"Great grief! what is that?" cried Tom, glancing with startled eyes at his companions.

"Trouble in camp," briefly replied Chester.

Still carrying the treasure, he started off at a run, closely followed by the others.

"Maybe the bark has returned," gasped Professor Pickle, breathing heavily from the unwonted exertion.

Tom did not reply, but he grimly cocked his revolver, as he sped over the ground at Chester's side. A few moments later they emerged from the palm forest, and found the camp in a state of intense excitement.

Men were running back and forth flourishing guns and revolvers; down at the edge of the beach stood Captain Brett up to his knees in water, and firing point-blank at the yacht, while on the deck of the latter were three men busily hoisting sail.

"Jumping ginger!" shouted Chester. "They are trying to run away with the *Explorer*."

Tom recognized the two prisoners near the railing, and felt that his chum was right.

Darting toward Mary Ann, who was hurling invectives after the traitors, he asked, hastily:

"What is the matter? How did this happen?"

"Ah, Tom, is that ye? Ye're jusht in toime to see us abandoned by thim villains. They do be runnin' away wid yer purty boat. Stop 'em, or we'll all perish on this divil's own spot."

"The captain had brought the men ashore for dinner, all except two, who were left to watch the *Explorer*," rapidly explained Violet, hurrying up at that juncture. "We were preparing the meal, when suddenly two sailors

rushed from the forest and jumped into the cutter. Before they could be stopped, they had pulled away from the beach. Then Captain Brett saw their object, and he fired at them, but without effect."

"Confound them! they have played us a scurvy trick," exclaimed the young leader. "They must be stopped in some way, or we'll be abandoned on this miserable island. There comes the *Nighthawk* now. If those villains get away they will join her."

It was indeed a sore predicament in which the party now found themselves. Both cutters were alongside the yacht, and there was absolutely no means of pursuing the traitors.

Tom felt like springing into the sea and swimming out to the *Explorer*, but he speedily gave up the idea. On board the yacht, the sailors were hard at work hoisting the mainsail.

Chester had joined the old skipper at the edge of the surf, and was now endeavoring to hit one of the men with a bullet from his rifle. The distance was too great for an accurate aim, however.

"Oi would give tin years av me loife if Oi could git wan av thim spalpanes be th' neck," exclaimed the Irishwoman vindictively. "Worra! worra! this do be a sad day for us."

Seeing the impotency of their efforts, Gage and Captain

Brett ceased firing, and joined Tom. The old skipper's face was convulsed with rage, and he uttered a string of strange oaths in such forceful style that Mary Ann gazed at him admiringly.

"We are dished this time, sure," remarked Chester, shaking his fist at the recreant crew on board the yacht.

"You are right," replied Tom, gloomily. "Those fellows will tell Flint and Scroggins about the treasure, and they will, no doubt, return to the United States, leaving us here on this floating island."

"Floating island?" echoed Violet in surprise.

The youth briefly explained Professor Pickle's wonderful discovery, at the same time assuring his listeners that to all intent they were just as safe as if upon an island having the bottom of the sea as its foundation.

"What we have reason to be alarmed at," he continued gravely, "is the great danger of our being left here with but little water. We have enough provisions to last for several months, if judiciously used, but unfortunately most of the water is on the *Explorer*."

"Don't vessels sometimes pass near here?" asked Violet.

"No ma'am, it is entirely outen the beaten track," replied the old skipper. "I've hearn tell of whalers being blown out o' their course in this direction, but that's certainly a poor chance to depend on."

"Well, we must hope for the——"

Violet was suddenly interrupted by a joyful shout from Chester, who stood pointing, in an ecstasy of delight, toward the yacht.

“Hurrah!” he exclaimed. “They have dropped one of the cutters.”

CHAPTER XXXV.

A LUCKLESS MISHAP.

It was as Gage had said. One of the cutters towing astern of the *Explorer*, which was now under way, had become detached from the painter, and now floated several yards in the rear of the yacht.

As yet the sailors on board had evidently not noticed it, and they continued to make sail in blissful ignorance of the accident. It was a trying moment for the watchers on the beach.

Here was a chance opportunely offered for them to gain the object of their heartfelt desires—a craft of any size. Would the mishap be discovered?

“I can’t stand this any longer,” hoarsely muttered Tom, throwing off his outer coat.

“What are you going to do?” demanded Chester, hurriedly.

“Swim out and secure the cutter,” was the brief reply.

“Then I am with you, chum!”

“You will both perish with the cold,” objected Violet. “Don’t risk your life. Let us remain together, and trust to some vessel passing this way. Please don’t go, Tom.”

“If them fellers don’t see the cutter and pick her up, it’ll

drift ashore in due time," said Captain Brett, confidently. "Really, it's too much risk to try to swim out there. It must be a mile, anyway."

"No; I must do it," replied Tom, firmly, completing his preparations. "Everything depends on our securing the cutter. Those scoundrels are liable to see it at any moment; then they will sail back for it. If we get the boat, some of us can try to make Cape Town, for the purpose of obtaining help."

"Come on, Tom," cried Chester, who was also in readiness for the perilous attempt. "We haven't any time to lose."

"You had better stay, chum; one is enough."

"Not much. I am going with you, and you can't help it."

While speaking, the courageous youth waded into the surf, and was soon breasting the waves. With a last look at Violet, our hero followed his example, and the twain struck out sturdily for the drifting cutter.

Slowly, but with unceasing efforts, they swam, keeping a constant eye on the yacht. It was a severe trial of strength and endurance, but both were enured to hardships by this time.

Captain Brett and his companions ashore watched the brave lads with overwhelming anxiety. Suddenly, Mary

Ann saw a commotion on the *Explorer*, and she drew the old skipper's attention to it.

"Groaning duffers!" shouted the latter, in dismay. "Them villains have discovered the loss of the cutter. Confound the luck! Why couldn't they have kept their blasted peepers ahead?"

What the Irishwoman beheld was a man near the stern, where he stood gesticulating to his mates, and pointing with one hand toward the cutter, bobbing up and down midway between the yacht and the island.

A moment later, the *Explorer* was brought about on the other tack, and then held stiff against the edge of the wind.

"Hoorra! she'll have to ware again before she can make it!" roared the old skipper, joyfully. "Now, if them boys git thar first, they can give a good account of theirselves. It's blamed lucky Tom took his revolver in the rubber bag. Oh, he's a wise lad."

In the meantime, our hero and his chum had also noticed the putting about of the yacht. They knew what it indicated, and both struck out with a grim determination to reach the drifting boat first, or die in the attempt.

No time was lost in conversation. They exchanged glances, and each read the resolution written in each other's face. The first numbing sensation of cold had now disappeared, but there still remained the dread possibility

of a sudden cramp, and they watched carefully for any untoward signs.

The *Explorer* was now heading as near for the cutter as the wind would permit. A continuation on that tack would bring her within three hundred yards. Would they ware again, or use the remaining boat?

Tom remembered, with a thankful heart, that not a single weapon had been left on board. If it came to a struggle, he had the advantage in possessing a revolver, effectually protected from the water.

Nearer and nearer drew the contestants in the novel race. To the anxious spectators on the island, the two minute spots on the broad expanse of sea representing Tom and Chester, were woefully distant from the goal.

The excitement was intense. Old Brett and the professor stood as if transfixed, while Mary Ann breathed over an incoherent offer of innumerable candles to some patron saint.

Violet could hardly bear to watch the race. At last she turned away, and hid her face, bidding her maid tell her of the progress of events. At last the yacht reached a point parallel with the cutter. Tom and his chum were still some distance away.

The *Explorer* was suddenly hove to, and a couple of men dropped into the other boat. They hastily shipped

the oars, and pulled frantically toward the drifting craft. It was now nip and tuck of a verity.

"They are almost there! Tom is ahead!" screeched Captain Brett, excitedly waving his hands.

"Whoop!" shouted Mary Ann. "Th' b'ys are going to win. Tom is near touching the boat."

"Them blamed sharks are trying to cut him off. Ah! the scoundrel struck at Chester with his oar, and—that's it, Tom! Hurrah! hurrah! he's in the cutter!"

Captain Brett's enthusiastic cheers so excited the Irish-woman that she unconsciously threw one arm around his shoulder, but the old skipper gave her an indignant shove, and then fairly danced up and down the beach in an excess of joy.

For Tom had won the race. Reaching the drifting prize just as the other cutter dashed up, he made a final effort, and scrambled over the gunwale. It was then but the work of a moment to snatch the revolver from its waterproof envelope and level it at the traitors.

The latter were furious at their defeat, but they wisely declined to give battle. Seeing the weapon in Tom's hand, they turned and pulled away for dear life.

At that juncture, the former's attention was claimed by Chester, who was so much exhausted that he could not climb into the boat. Hastily assisting him aboard, Tom fired a shot after the retreating sailors, but missed them.

"We must follow them and try to recapture the yacht," he cried. "I will reserve the rest of the cartridges until we get nearer."

"Whew! I am almost tuckered out," gasped young Gage. "But I guess I can row a little. We mustn't miss this chance, if we lose a leg."

"I think Flint and his gang are aware that something has happened," said Tom, pointing toward the distant bark. "See, they are making all sail."

"Yes, and they are waring around in this direction."

"We will have to make the capture before the *Nighthawk* reaches the yacht. We wouldn't last as long as a frost in June with her crew."

The other cutter had gained a considerable start before Tom and his companion began the chase, and they were now halfway to the *Explorer*. Two men still remained on board. They were busy bringing the craft around, so as to meet their boat.

Tom had seen, with surprise and indignation, that two of his own sailors had gone over to the enemy, and he resolved to have a bitter reckoning with the traitors if he should ever get them in his power again.

"They are four men to a couple of boys, but this little joker evens up matters somewhat," he said to Chester, in-

dicating his revolver. "If we only get near enough to use it, we will stand some——"

Crack! went his oar at that moment, and he reeled back against Chester, knocking that lad into the bottom of the cutter.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE YACHT RECAPTURED.

The breaking of his oar at such a critical moment almost caused Tom to cry with vexation and disappointment. The suddenness of the catastrophe had sent him reeling against Gage, the shock throwing the latter upon his back in the bottom of the cutter.

Both recovered their former positions at once. Tossing the useless piece of wood overboard, Tom drew his revolver, and said, grimly:

"We've got to risk it now. Just steady the boat while I take aim. Our only chance is to hit one of those scoundrels."

It was a situation to try the hand of a better marksman than our hero. The cutter was wobbling about from wave to wave in such a manner that a sure aim was impossible.

"It's trusting to luck," said Chester, gravely. "You have six shots left. I would fire five, and reserve one in case they should turn on us."

Crouching near the middle, Tom rested the barrel of the weapon upon his left arm, and, after a brief pause, pulled the trigger. He had aimed at the sailor in the after part of the boat.

The sharp report of the pistol was instantly followed by a cry of agony. The man spun around, and fell prostrate across the gunwale, the force of his fall almost capsizing the craft.

"By cricky! you have hit him!" cried Chester. "That was a splendid shot."

Suddenly, to the surprise of both, the man staggered to his feet, and attempted to seize the oar he had dropped. His mate had ceased rowing for the moment, but he now commenced paddling toward the oncoming yacht.

"I must have barely grazed him," said Tom. "It has had some effect, though. Row away Chester; cover as much space as you can while I try to frighten them."

Gage began rowing, using his oar on alternate sides, and Tom shouted to the sailors to stop or he would fire again. For the purpose of emphasizing his command, he stood up, and pretended to take a careful aim.

The maneuver had immediate effect. Evidently believing that he could shoot them without any trouble, the sailors held up their hands, as a token of surrender.

A faint cheer came to the lad's ears from shore. It was evident the party on the distant beach were watching their progress with anxious eyes. A voice, hoarse with passion, came from the yacht:

"Come on, ye blamed fools!" it said. "Don't let 'em

catch ye. Wot air ye afraid of? He can't hit ye at that distance."

But the men in the cutter had had a plentiful experience. What was really a chance shot, seemed to them the effort of an expert marksman, and they had no liking for further risk.

Under Chester's skillful guidance, the one-oared cutter slowly approached the one containing the surrendering sailors. It was tedious work propelling the heavy craft, but the distance was finally covered.

"Now, you men," said Tom, flourishing his revolver, as a token of his authority, "I want you to understand that I have the drop on you, and if my orders are not obeyed on the instant there will be trouble."

The wounded fellow—whom Tom now recognized as Watkins' mate—made a gesture of assent with such alacrity that Chester was compelled to smile. It was plainly evident he did not desire any more proof of our hero's skill with a pistol.

"Toss me one of those spare oars," commanded Tom.

He was obeyed instantly.

"Now, row back to the yacht as quickly as you can. Chester, you follow close behind them, while I keep watch."

A few moments later, both boats were alongside the *Explorer*. The young leader promptly climbed over the

gangway. He found Bill Watkins and the other sailor sullenly awaiting him near the mainmast.

They would have tried to escape if they could have handled the craft. That an attempt had been made, was proven by the appearance of the running rigging.

Not stopping to berate them for their treachery, Tom sternly bade them make sail for the island. Gage was stationed at the wheel, and the wounded sailor—who had only received a slight scratch on his cranium—placed at the main tack.

The bark was still bowling down before the wind, and had now reached a distance of not more than a mile from the yacht. Tom had great confidence in the sailing qualities of his craft, and felt but little alarm.

After getting every possible inch of sail spread, he joined Gage. The young steersman was stamping around the wheel in an effort to counteract the extreme cold, which had been greatly augmented by his wet clothes.

“Jump down into the cabin and see if you can’t find a change,” suggested Tom. “I’ll steer while you are gone. Look up something for me also. I have just begun to feel the weather myself.”

Chester succeeded in running across a couple of suits and heavy coats. After they donned them, each felt far more comfortable. It was only the sturdy constitution of

the boys that permitted them to pass through such an exposure without serious results.

The superior speed of the yacht now became manifest. She soon increased the space between her and the bark, and continued to gain steadily. The four seamen speedily observed it, and their mutterings of disappointment were heard by Tom and his chum.

"I guess they rather depended upon the *Nighthawk*," said the former, with a grim smile. "In all probability, they would not have surrendered so easily otherwise."

"What is your plan? To keep on sailing around the island?"

"No, we'll run up within easy gun-shot of the beach, and then you can take two of the men and row ashore for reinforcements and weapons."

"What then? Are you going to chase the bark if she comes very near?"

"No, siree!" replied Tom, emphatically. "I have had enough of fighting for a while, and I don't propose to look for any more. If they leave us alone, we will embark, all hands and the stores, and start for Cape Town this very day."

"That suits me."

"There isn't any use remaining here a day longer. The professor has succeeded in securing a specimen of his

onion ; we have discovered the treasure," here Tom smiled, "and the yacht is quite ready to make the trip."

"I would like to take that old wreck along and exhibit in New York. I'll bet a dog we could charge a dollar a head admission," said Chester, practically. "Just fancy the romantic story that could be given the newspapers as an advertisement."

"The main reason why I wish to leave these latitudes is because of Violet. She has borne up nobly, but I don't fancy she is very comfortable."

"Nor Mary Ann," added Gage, with a sly grin. "That poor woman is also delicate and——"

But Tom had hurried forward to escape his chaffing. Meanwhile, the yacht had been steadily drawing nearer the island. On the beach were still gathered Captain Brett and the rest. They had cheered themselves into a state of hoarseness, and now stood awaiting the coming of the recaptured craft.

The bark had not changed her course, a fact Tom viewed with surprise. She was dropping astern so obviously that he had thought those on board would give up the pursuit.

"I am afraid they intend to give us battle, anyway," he said to Gage.

"It certainly looks like it. I guess they are desperate

now, and will risk anything to get that treasure, which, you know, they still think is on the island.

Tom's attention was suddenly called to the weather by a heavy gust of wind, which sent the *Explorer* heeling over to leeward. Glancing up, he saw that the sky had become overcast from horizon to horizon. A peculiar bank of somber clouds toward the south, recalled to him Captain Brett's warning about the danger of sudden squalls.

"We are going to have a storm, and that before long," said Gage. "Why, the sky was clear, and the sea almost as calm as a mill-pond when we swam out to the cutter."

"I hope it holds off until we get everything aboard," replied Tom, apprehensively. "We will soon be near enough for you to take the cutters ashore. Don't waste any time in explaining matters, but tell Brett to send off Violet and Mary Ann at once. Have him load both boats with as many stores as he can pile in. We may not be able to make more than one trip."

"One good thing. The water is deep clear up to the land, so we won't be compelled to row very far."

Mentally spanning the distance between the bark and the yacht, Tom concluded that he would have at least half an hour before Flint and his crew could arrive within rifle shot.

This was cheering, as he intended to get away from the island before meeting the *Nighthawk*, and, if possible,

avoid her altogether. The wind still continued to increase, but it had shifted slightly, and was now blowing from the southeast.

This, fortunately, made a breakwater of the island, and checked the force of the waves just where the cutters were to land. After sailing within three hundred yards of the beach, the yacht was hove to. Chester lost but little time in manning a boat. With his sailors, he sprang into one and started ashore, towing the other.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE WRECK OF THE BARK.

It was not long before the little stretch of beach was the scene of the most intense activity. Captain Brett instantly set the men to work loading the cutters, and within fifteen minutes, they were making the return trip to the yacht.

Tom only greeted Violet with a brief word. He then turned to and assisted in hoisting the stores on board. Mary Ann was worth two men in this work, and even the professor displayed a commendable activity.

His first duty, however, was to carefully store away a small round bundle, evidently containing his precious specimen. Only two trips were found necessary, and within the half hour, sail was again being made on the yacht.

It was high time. The *Nighthawk* had arrived within easy pistol shot when the *Explorer* had gained steerage-way. Arranged along her after rail were five or six men, brandishing rifles and revolvers. Foremost in the array of villainous faces, was that of Nicholas Flint.

Next to him stood Rufus Kane, and still farther aft was the sturdy figure of Captain Scroggins. Chester leisurely surveyed them through a powerful glass.

"Humph! a fine collection of mugs for the rogues' gallery," he said.

"They evidently mean business," replied the old skipper. "If they want a fight we—— Look out!"

He had barely uttered the warning, when a rattle of musketry came from the bark. The leaden messengers of destruction whizzed through the rigging, and spent their force in the distance, without harming any one.

"Captain Brett, have some of the men mount the repeating rifle near the wheel," quietly directed Tom. "If matters get too warm, we'll give them a dose of their own medicine. Don't fire until I give the word."

Violet and Mary Ann had been sent below immediately on boarding the *Explorer*. The four mutineers were also placed out of harm's reach, and, for the time being, heavily ironed.

Knowing that the yacht's best work could be obtained with the wind off the quarter, the old skipper accordingly gave a course of due north, and then had every stitch of canvas flattened and soaked with water.

After the first volley, Flint and his companions reserved their fire, and turned their attention to the bark. Sail after sail was spread, until the old craft seemed a mass of snowy canvas.

"There he goes setting his royals and the flying-jib," said Captain Brett. "He must be crazy spreading that

light stuff in the face of a gale. The wind is doubling its strength every blessed moment, and if it keeps on we'll have a sixty-knotter afore night."

"I'll tell you what he is trying to do," suddenly spoke up Chester. "He evidently wants to head us off near the end of the island and run us down."

The youth's reasoning was plausible. The positions of the two vessels were now as follows: The yacht was skirting the shore, with an offing of not more than half a mile, and with at least three miles before her to the end of the island, while the bark was standing in direct for the point of land which the *Explorer* would have to pass before clearing the island.

As Chester had said, it was evidently their intention to intercept the yacht, either for the purpose of ramming it, or to again draw within range.

"It shows how desperate they have become," said Tom. "It is not a question of capturing us now, but to strike a last blow. It is a pity the sea is so high, as I am of a mind to try a shot from the repeater. Whew! look how black it is getting to windward!"

"We are going to catch it, sure," gravely replied the old skipper. "It'll be blowing your hair off before many hours. I guess we had better shorten sail, Tom. Them sticks is not over strong, and they'll carry away on us if we don't watch out."

Even as he spoke, a small staysail set up forward, split, with a loud report, and in an instant the spread of canvas was a mass of fluttering ribbons. Captain Brett sprang forward, and his stentorian voice was soon heard ordering the men to shorten sail.

At almost the same instant, the *Nighthawk's* fore-royal, carried away, and torn clean from the fastenings, disappeared in the gathering gloom to leeward like a ghost of the storm.

It was a warning that Captain Scroggins could not neglect. Tom and Chester saw him gesticulate to his crew, and a moment later the topgallant sails were being furled and reefs taken in the courses.

It was now about three o'clock. The sun had entirely disappeared—buried in a somber mass of black clouds—and the gloom deepened to such an extent that it was barely possible to distinguish the land.

The wind was increasing steadily. It whistled through the tautened rigging until each rope stood like a rigid bar of steel, and whipped the fraying ends of the wrecked staysail about until it was perilous to approach the fore-castle.

A peculiar moaning crept through the air—a weird sound, as of jungle beasts scenting danger. It grew apace, and at last developed into a roar of awful intensity.

It was the song of the living gale, and when the old

skipper hearkened to it, he cast many anxious glances at the small expanse of canvas still remaining.

"We'll have to take in a few more rags," he bellowed into Tom's ear.

"Do as you think best," replied that youth, wisely surrendering his authority to the experienced mariner.

A double reef was taken in the mainsail, and the foresail furled entirely. This left only the former and a narrow point of staysail still spread. It was ample to send the stanch yacht almost upon her beam ends with every succeeding blast of wind.

The bark was not long in following the example, but she still continued in pursuit. The two vessels were now drawing very close together. Barely five hundred yards separated them, and it was an equal distance to the end of the island.

The condition of affairs had been resolved into a thrilling race. If the yacht gained the point of land first, she could still round it with a free sheet, but if the *Nighthawk* reached it at the same moment, or before, the danger of a disastrous collision would be extreme.

Tom and his companions now saw that such a culmination was Flint's idea.

"It must be avoided at any cost," exclaimed the young leader, eying the bark's advance with great apprehension. "If that big hulk of a vessel should strike the *Explorer*,

we would be cut down in an instant. Captain Brett, we must risk more sail."

"We are doing pretty well, as it is," remarked that mariner, with a wave of his hand toward the broad wake. "It'll take a few minutes to set the canvas, and by that time we will have reached the point."

"Or the *Nighthawk* will have reached us," spoke up Chester. "By George! she is drawing mighty near. I can almost read her name abaft the figure-head."

As matters stood, it was impossible for the yacht to tack. Such a maneuver would bring her directly in front of the bark. The sole course was to stand on toward the end of the island, and trust to luck.

Gathered on the forecastle head of the *Nighthawk* was a group of men, composed of Nicholas Flint, Rufus Kane and Captain Scroggins. All three bore rifles, with the muzzles pointing toward the yacht. They were evidently not conversing, but stood silent and alert, awaiting a chance to fire.

The terrible pitching of both craft rendered an aim almost impossible. Still the trio were prepared for an attempt to discharge a volley of bullets beyond a doubt.

Tom smiled grimly when he saw them. He realized that he was to be the target, but he had no fear of the result. It was the close proximity of the bark that he dreaded.

Both vessels were now making heavy weather of it. The waves had formed into long curling rollers, with a sweep to them that sent each craft surging onward with irresistible force. The distance between them was rapidly narrowing.

Tom clinched his hands, and gazed ahead to where the point of land could be dimly seen, three hundred yards away. Nearer drew the bark. A yell of exultation came from her crew. Chester and several of the sailors sent back a ringing cheer of defiance.

"She's going to catch us, certain," gasped Captain Brett, his face paling under its coating of bronze. "She'll hit us if we don't——"

Stopping in the middle of his sentence, he sprang to the wheel, and altered the course half a point. The yacht was now aiming directly for the extreme point of land. If no submarine edge extended out, a few yards could thus be saved without danger. It was a terrible risk.

Suddenly, a hoarse shout came from the forecastle of the bark—an evil cry of triumph. Tom turned, and saw the bowsprit of the *Nighthawk* within a biscuit throw. Another moment and the towering hull would crash upon them. Nearer, and yet nearer it came. Two hundred feet, one hundred, fifty—and then, with an inarticulate cry, Captain Brett threw himself upon the wheel, and sent it spinning from port to starboard.

The sorely buffeted yacht reeled, then swung around before the wind just as the *Nighthawk* crashed past her, carrying away the bowsprit, with all its attending stays.

Then, just as Chester turned to his chum with a shout of congratulation, a shot rang out from the bark's fore-castle, and Tom staggered back against the cabin-hatch, and dropped, limp and motionless, to the deck.

While all stood appalled at the sudden catastrophe, a thunderous crash sounded, and, in the midst of the white spume cast up by the breakers, the rending timbers of the *Nighthawk* were seen as she surged ashore—a total wreck!

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

Even in that moment of terrible danger, and with Tom shot down almost at his feet, Captain Brett—sturdy old mariner that he was—did not release his grip on the wheel.

It was this fact only that saved the yacht, and kept her from sharing the fate of the wrecked bark. Twenty seconds after the *Nighthawk* had passed to her doom, the *Explorer* rounded the point of land, and swept on into comparative safety.

By this time, a darkness as of night set in, and the island, with its twin wrecks—two centuries apart—faded out of sight astern, never more to be seen by those on board the yacht.

When Chester recovered from his horror and stupefaction, he ran to Tom's side, and made a hasty examination of the wounded youth. He found, to his great relief, that he was still breathing. Calling aid, he had him conveyed down to the cabin.

Violet and Mary Ann were crouched in one corner, pallid with terror, but when they saw the unconscious young leader, they instantly set to work, and speedily brought him to his senses.

Professor Pickle—who had taken a degree in medicine at some remote period of his existence—searched for the wound, and found a small round hole in Tom's right shoulder. Utilizing a forcep from the medicine case, he succeeded in extracting the bullet.

The place was then properly bandaged, and a few moments later our hero found himself lying weak and exhausted in his stateroom, a very ill patient. Violet's grief was almost overwhelming, and, as for Mary Ann—she made the cabin ring with her "worras!" and "ochones!"

Presently, Captain Brett came down and joined the chorus of regrets and imprecations, and finally, the professor was compelled to pack them off out of hearing, for the welfare of his patient.

"Poor Tom!" sighed Chester, when they had reached the upper deck. "I hope he is not badly wounded."

"He is hit in a mighty serious place," replied the old skipper, in a similar tone. "I saw many a soldier and sailor in the late onpleasantness go to Davy Jones' locker from the same injury. D'ye see, a bit of the cloth must have gone in with the bullet, and that's liable to cause a poisoning."

"Don't talk like that, confound you!" exclaimed his companion. "You are a regular Job's comforter. I don't believe—at least, I hope and pray that Tom will get well. I—I don't want to think otherwise."

In the course of an hour, word was brought up by Mary Ann that Tom had gone to sleep and was apparently slightly better. This official bulletin was received with every manifestation of joy by our hero's stanch friends.

Captain Brett was so encouraged that he set about repairing the damage to the forward part of the yacht. Before morning, the gale showed signs of abating, and by daylight the wind and sea had subsided considerably.

Chester passed a sleepless night, and begged his way into Tom's stateroom just as the latter awoke. Violet and Mary Ann were also present to greet the invalid, under penalty that they would be driven out on the first sign of excitement.

As yet, Tom had not been told of the *Nighthawk's* fate, and it was left to Gage to acquaint him of the wreck. Despite the enmity shown him by his former guardian and others, Tom was greatly shocked.

"You say that she struck the beach directly after I was shot?" he asked, feebly.

"Yes, I saw her masts go by the board, and then a whole wall of water break over the hull. She didn't last a minute, and the scoundrel that wounded you hadn't very long to enjoy his triumph."

"An' glad Oi wuz to hear that the dhirty rogues got their just dues at last!" chimed in Mary Ann, vindictively.

"How is the yacht? Is she damaged very much?" asked our hero.

"No. That stick Captain Brett put up as a bowsprit was carried away, and the deck sprung a little forward, but it don't amount to much. The gale is blowing over, and we are heading dead for Cape Town. Everything would be lovely if you were only on deck."

"I'll be with you again before we get in, never fear," replied Tom, smilingly.

His words were not prophetic, however. Day after day passed, and still he remained in bed. The wound, which at first had seemed healthy, became inflamed, and the professor looked very grave.

At last, Tom's illness was considered very serious. Professor Pickle had tried every remedy on board, but without the slightest success. One bright morning, several days from the Cape, he was seated on deck, poring over a medical volume.

Chester was standing near the rail, glancing over the white-capped waves, with saddened eyes. Suddenly he heard a shrill whoop of exultation, and turning, saw the professor vanishing down the cabin companionway.

Thinking he had gone daft, Gage hastily followed him below. He arrived just in time to see him emerge from his stateroom. The professor held a small round bundle,

wrapped in oiled silk, in his hands, and, as Gage approached, he began to remove the covering.

"What is the matter?" asked Chester, seeing that the scientist was greatly excited.

"I have found it. I have discovered a remedy. We can cure poor Thomas now!"

By that, the last wrapping had been removed, exposing to Chester's astonished eyes—the specimen of the genus *Allium*. In fact, the onion.

The very sight of the peculiar, insignificant-looking plant aroused the enthusiasm of the botanist, and he shook his head mournfully. It was his all—his grandest prize. He had traveled thousands of miles, had undergone almost incredible hardships, and spent many hundreds of dollars to secure it, now——

"Do you mean to say that your onion will help Tom?" eagerly asked Gage, interrupting Professor Pickle's train of regretful thoughts.

"Yes; I have just read in a learned medical work that those members of the genus *Allium* having strongly marked exterior circles and a pulpy core, are very efficacious in sloughing wounds, and also invaluable in the treatment of blood-poisoning."

"Then try it, sir," pleaded Chester, anxiously. "Do not delay for a moment. You can get plenty of onions in Fulton Market at home."

"But not this class, young man," remarked the professor, solemnly. "I would not part with this specimen for the gold of a Vanderbilt, but for—for Thomas' sake I will give up anything."

There were traces of tears in the old gentleman's eyes as he walked toward Tom's room, but he proceeded resolutely with his duty, and before many moments had elapsed the precious specimen was transformed into a common poultice.

The effect was really wonderful, and by the second day following, Tom was on the high road to complete recovery. By request of the professor, he was not told of the sacrifice, and it was not until many months afterward that he knew the story.

Just two weeks from the time of leaving the island, the *Explorer* sailed into Table Bay, and again dropped anchor off Cape Town. Her coming soon brought Mr. Boyd—Violet's relative—and the meeting between them was very affecting.

The whole party, with the exception of Captain Brett, went ashore, and took up their quarters with the hospitable merchant. The old skipper remained on board to superintend the extensive repairs ordered by our hero, but he paid frequent visits to the house, much to Mary Ann's delight.

The jovial Irishwoman had developed a fondness for

the bluff old skipper, which not even his strenuous objections could quench. This state of affairs opened up a wide field for Chester's fun-loving nature, and the young scamp seized the opportunity for any quantity of sport at their expense.

Tom found his period of convalescence in the fine climate of South Africa very pleasant, and he prolonged the time of departure from day to day until six weeks had elapsed. He laid the couse of this tardiness at the door of his health, but as Mary Ann aptly put it:

"It's mesilf as knows phy yez don't want to leave here, Tom. It's becaze yer don't care to forsake the purty flowers—'specially th' Violets. He! he! he!"

At last, a day was set for sailing, but twenty-four hours before that time, startling news came to the little party. One morning early, a much battered and wave-worn American whaler arrived in port.

Always glad to see anything flying the dear old flag, Tom and his chum boarded the craft, and from her captain heard a story of the most intense interest to them.

It seems that the whaler had been blown far to the southward of Cape of Good Hope by a series of gales, and, while making her way back toward the African coast, had sighted a peculiar island, covered with palms. Thinking that he could secure a fresh supply of water, the captain had landed near what seemed to be the recent wreck of

a bark. On investigating he found traces of boat-building, and odds and ends, indicating that a party of shipwrecked sailors had lived for some days on the island.

"I also ran across a mound of earth, like a grave, and at the head of it was a rude cross, bearing a name," added the worthy mariner.

"What was it?" asked Tom and Chester, in a breath.

"I disremember now, but I think the last name was Holt."

"Ah!" exclaimed Tom. "It was Cyrus Holt. The lesser villain has at last met his just deserts. But you are certain all the others escaped?"

The captain hesitated a moment before replying, then he asked, earnestly:

"They weren't friends of yours, were they?"

"No. On the contrary, they were our bitter enemies."

"Then it won't shock ye to hear what I ran across later, I guess. On the morning of the fourth day after leaving that queer island, my lookout in the foretop sighted a boat dead ahead. It took us some time to beat up to it, but we finally ran alongside of it. I tell ye young gentlemen, I have sailed the briny for nigh on to forty years, but never before have I seen a worse looking sight.

"There were six human beings in that boat, but of them six only one was alive. He was a man with one of the

most cruel faces I ever saw, and he was mad—stark, staring mad. He crouched in the bottom of the boat as we approached, and laughed like a man at a circus. Suddenly, just as we were preparing to whip him out with a block and tackle, he sprang on the gunwale, and yelled: 'I see you, Tom Truxton. The green water can't hide you from me. You have the gold I sinned for, and you can't escape!' With that, he jumped overboard, and disappeared from sight."

"My heaven! what an end!" exclaimed Tom, horrified. "It was Nicholas Flint, beyond a doubt."

"We gave a decent burial to the rest of the poor wretches," concluded the captain, "and then made the best of our way here. You knew them then, did ye?"

He was given a brief description of the facts in the case, and then Tom and his chum hastened ashore with the wonderful news. It will only be telling the strict truth to say that not one expressed any regrets. The fate of the arch-villain and his infamous associates was commensurate with their evil deeds.

On the following day, the *Explorer* sailed for New York. Violet and Mary Ann were to remain six months longer in Cape Town, and then they were to return home.

The yacht carried out several new members in her crew,

as the four mutineers had been put ashore for their misdeeds. The voyage to the United States proved uneventful, and a trifle over two months after sailing, the beautiful bay of the American metropolis was reached.

During the trip home, Professor Pickle prepared a lengthy and most learned treatise on the subject of floating islands, and also a brochure concerning the remarkable discovery of the seventeenth century yacht *Speed-away*. Both papers were widely published, and earned for the devoted scientist an international reputation.

After a rest of several months, Tom and his faithful chum, Chester Gage, set sail in the *Explorer*—Captain Brett in command—for the West Indies, where they expect to remain until the return of Violet and Mary Ann. Chester states that the old skipper is looking fondly for a reunion with the latter, but the hunted expression upon his face when the Amazon's name is mentioned belies the assertion.

It is the expressed intention of our hero to enter Harvard with Chester in due time, and then to revive the old banking firm, of which his father was the head, when he gains his majority. As a matter of course, Chester will have a prominent position in the bank, and it may be that even Captain Brett will be found there in some capacity.

It is too early to predict the outcome of Tom's attachment for Violet, but it will doubtless be another chapter in the old, old story of which Master Cupid is the cunning author. If such should ultimately be the case, never fear but what Mary Ann—honest and faithful friend that she is—will rule the new household.

THE END.

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